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JUNE 2017 - SABINE & NATCHITOCHE PARISHES

Efforts to Save Hodges Gardens State Park from Closure Continue

Since learning of the potential closing of Hodges Gardens State Park in Florien, visitors, interested persons and the organization, Friends of Hodges Gardens State Park, are battling to keep the park open. Also springing into action by starting a petition was *All Things Sabine*, a not-for-profit three-year-old Facebook community and website which posts photos, stories and videos related to the geographic area along the Sabine River and beyond. Since Louisiana is going through a budget crisis, several parks are on the "chopping block" to terminate funding. Hodges Gardens is one of them.

Hodges Gardens State Park operates under a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the A.J. and Nona Triggs Hodges Foundation. Recently, the Louisiana Office of State Parks received a notice of default from the Foundation in anticipation that the park will not be funded adequately for the upcoming fiscal year, which starts on July 1. The park is on the National Register of Historic Places and consists of about 107,000 acres.

All Things Sabine indicated to *Around the Town*: "Ten years ago, the Foundation entered into a cooperative agreement with the State of Louisiana whereby the State was granted use of the prime 770 acres of the 4,800-acre Hodges Gardens property. Through this agreement, the State would operate this acreage as Hodges Gardens State Park and would maintain the grounds.

Eventually, the State repaired deteriorated roads inside the park, maintained the grounds nicely, fixed up the cabins, added some cabins, added railings for safety around the rock features, removed an old group cabin which had fallen into disrepair and added in its place a new \$300,000 "state-of-the-art" (if you will) group cabin at which groups of individuals can stay for various purposes (youth organizations, church

groups, wedding groups, private parties, etc). In all, the State invested millions into Hodges Gardens over the past 10 years.

Supplementing the State's investment, a private non-profit group named "Friends of Hodges Gardens" has through the years collected donations to fund various projects at Hodges. These projects included, but were hardly limited to, funding needed for improvements themselves, such as repairs on water fountains and other water features thereby going a long way in making the park beautiful and unique... not to mention the single best place to take portrait photographs in Sabine Parish."

The property of Hodges Gardens remains under private ownership...as explained, the Hodges Foundation owns the land and the State operates it as a park. Complicating things for Hodges Gardens at this time is that the Hodges Foundation earlier this year initiated a process of apparently attempting to reclaim the property, or rather kicking the State out (that is the best way I can describe it) and attempting to take back full rights to the property. The Foundation's legal argument behind their quest to take the property back is that it is their contention that the State is in breach of its contract with the Foundation in that Hodges Gardens is not sufficiently funded by the State, meaning



Photo Credit: All Things Sabine

it is their belief that the State does not intend to fully fund the needed maintenance to keep the park in the condition in which the State received the Gardens' property.

That contention by the Foundation, however, is disputed not so much by the State, which has remained a bit mum on the legalities surrounding the Gardens, but by members of Friends of Hodges Gardens as well as at least one legal expert, Sabine District Attorney Don Burkett. In a recent public forum regarding Hodges Gardens, Burkett expressed his conviction that the State was in fact not out of compliance with the contract between it and the Hodges Foundation. Burkett explained that he was not speak-

HODGES GARDENS - Page 2

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HODGES GARDENS

ing in any official capacity, but rather as a supporter of Hodges Gardens offering his legal opinion.

“I read the contract and it is my considered opinion that we are not in default,” Burkett said. “I don’t care what they say, we are not in default. Now if they appropriate no money and things start going south real fast after July 1, yes, maybe we’ll be in default at some point. But as we sit here today, we are not in default.”

However, and this is paramount to Hodges’ future, the State must allocate funding needed to maintain the Hodges Gardens for the 2017-18 fiscal year, which begins July 1.

As of press time, the Louisiana Legislature was still in session. To read the entire *All Things Sabine* article on the possible closing of Hodges Gardens State Park, go to: <http://allthingsabine.com/efforts-to-save-hodges-gardens-from-closure-continue/>.



Photo Credit: All Things Sabine

A Word from God Concerning Cancer

by Bobby Slaydon

I was scheduled for my first visit to MD Anderson in Houston, Texas on Monday October 12, 2015. A recent diagnosis of Intermediate level Prostate Cancer had prompted the need for the visit. Having had only fifty birthdays and enjoying the gift God has given me to be Husband, Father, Uncle, Friend and most of all, child of the Most High, the news that I had cancer overwhelmed my emotions.

Sunday, October 11, 2015, started with a cup of coffee followed by the usual routine of getting ready for the morning service at The Life Church. I got into the shower and began with a head full of both shampoo and thoughts of the upcoming medical visit to address the diagnosis I had been given. Without prompt or prayer, the Spirit of God entered the shower with me. I began feeling His love, His peace, His reassurance and THAT was overwhelming. I began to thank Him for spontaneously coming to me in the shower, just me and my Lord and Savior. I have since realized that He had seen my attempts to be courageous, to show my faith and to make those who love me to know that I am not afraid. Yet He knows my fear and my discouragement and it was at a time, when I was secluded from all others, that He chose to visit me in such a dynamic manner. The Holy Ghost, the very comforter Jesus had told His disciples He would send, was present with me and began to minister to me and my need. The following is a clear revelation of God’s idea of my diagnosis for me and that of many others of His children:

Why, God impressed, do you think that Goliath stood and shouted to the armies of Israel for forty days? Why, if Goliath and the Philistines were mightier than Israel, did Goliath have a need to voice his challenge rather than just go forward and destroy by force God’s chosen? The reason, God impressed, was that Goliath and his armies feared that they would not be able to defeat God’s chosen. So, Goliath, the champion of destruction among the armies of the Philistines, determined to get God’s chosen to agree to be defeated. Goliath cried, “Send me a man to fight with me, if I overcome him you will be our servants but if he defeats me, then we will be your servants.” God impressed, the armies of Israel possessed the power to overcome the armies of the Philistines but Goliath created such a fear that none was willing to exercise that power.

David picked up five stones on his way out to battle Goliath. I have always said that he did so because Goliath had four brothers. God impressed, David picked up five stones because he didn’t know how the battle would proceed. David had told Saul that he (David) would fight with and overcome this uncircumcised Philistine who defies the armies of the Living God. David did know the outcome of the battle just not the details thereof, so he picked up five stones. While David knew that he was excellent with his sling, he also considered that he was not perfect, so he chose five stones instead of just one.

*In the shower, God then impressed me with the letters WSPT. The attitude with which David entered the battle was WSPT. “Because I have **WORSHIPED** the living God, because I have **SERVED** the people of the living God, and because I was anointed and have a **PROMISE** from the living God, I **TRUST** my relationship with the living God!!!!”*

David defeated Goliath and the result was that the armies of Israel gained the faith to defeat the Philistines. One man’s TRUST in his relationship with the living God gave courage to an army to exercise the Power given to them by the living God.

Cancer, the Spirit impressed, is nothing more than a Goliath in this day and age. He is the champion of destruction among the armies of sickness and disease. He presents challenges to God’s chosen in an attempt to defeat them mentally and emotionally in order that his battle with their flesh can be won. “Agree that I am greater than your relationship with God and you and all those who, like you, claim a relationship with God (who may be standing and watching as did the armies of Israel when David went out against Goliath) will be my servants.” All of God’s people, true believers, trust in God and that He is able to heal. Therefore Cancer attacks the trust in the relationship not in God Himself.

In my shower I began to realize that because I have Worshipped the living God, because I have Served the people of the living God, because I received a Promise with the Holy Ghost (power in me according to Jesus words in Acts 1:8), I can Trust my relationship with the living God, Jesus Christ my Savior and my healer. My walk with God is not perfect but I strive for excellence and so while I don’t know the details of this battle, I do know the outcome. I will not doubt but will believe that neither I nor any of the people of the Most High God in the year of our Lord 2015 will be a servant to Cancer. As the Philistines became the servant of God’s army, so shall Cancer become a servant to God’s spiritual army in this day and in this time.
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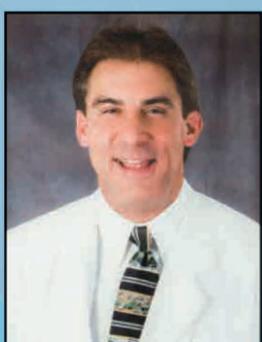
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The Story of the Rock Chapel

by Junior Johnson

I have always been attracted to historic sites in obscure places. I learned of a solitary stone building located on a hill in a wooded area near the community of Carmel, La. It is simply known as the Rock Chapel. It is all that remains of a Monastery built in the 1800s by the Carmelite Order of the Catholic Church.

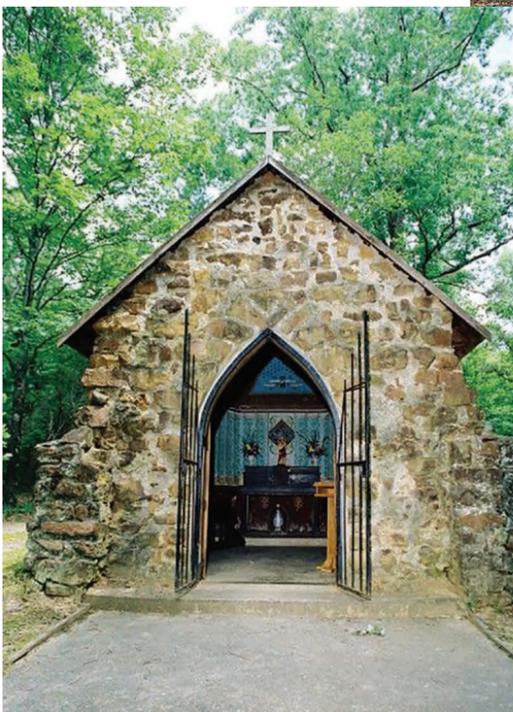
On this site the Carmelite Monks built their Monastery, Convent, a school for girls, and the Rock Chapel, which was constructed with stones from the surrounding area. There were approximately sixty men and boys, and six Nuns who lived in the Monastery under the leadership of Father Peters.

Tragedy struck in November of 1904, when a fire destroyed everything except the Rock Chapel. The building was left to the elements and was deserted until 1960, when the Catholic Diocese commissioned Eugenie Manning, a local artist, to photograph the artwork on the ceiling and walls of the Chapel, and prepare a plan for restoring the artwork done by the Monks. Her painstaking work took nine months to complete. Funding was primarily through donations, which permitted the Chapel to be restored.

Today this is the only structure which sits back on a hill with several graves of Monks who died while residing at the Monastery. The picture that I took of the exterior is by a small arched bridge that crosses a stream running through the area.

To find the Rock Chapel, take the Carmel Exit off I-49 south of Shreveport. From Hwy 509, take the Carmel Loop to Smithport Road. There is an iron gate at the gravel road that winds down to a parking area near the Chapel.

You can call LaJuana Shriver at



(318) 461-4521 for a key to the gate and Chapel. There is no charge for this, but I would encourage you to make a small donation for her time and to aid in the upkeep of the area. She can also tell you how the grounds can be reserved for family reunions and picnics, and even weddings.

Regardless of your religious background, this place had a spiritual feeling that will move you beyond words. You are truly on sacred ground when you visit the Rock Chapel.

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Open Letter From Natchitoches Parish Councilman, Russell Rachal

It is with great pleasure that I am able to visit with you again this month to keep you posted on what is happening with the Natchitoches Parish Government. During the May 15, 2017 meeting, we as a Council voted 5-0 to remove the requirement of having an engineering degree from the Director of Public Works position in the personnel manual. Prior to this new ordinance, the personnel manual required that the occupant of this position must have an engineering degree. The requirement to be a licensed engineer was placed on this position to tailor-fit the position for the person that is currently occupying it. The Council also introduced an ordinance to be heard at the June 19, 2017 Council meeting creating a new position of a part-time Parish Engineer. Before you strangle me, let me explain the reasoning behind this proposed ordinance. There is absolutely nothing constructive being done with the roads at the Road Maintenance Department. The position of Director of Public Works is occupied by a licensed engineer. It is evident that this is not working well for the residents of Natchitoches Parish. Per the Home Rule Charter, the Council has no authority to remove anyone from a position or to abolish a position without the Parish President's authority. By creating this new part-time position, this will allow the administration to fill the Director of Public Works position with someone that knows how and is willing to maintain the roads properly by providing routine maintenance on the roads by grading and pulling the ditches. It does not take an engineer to accomplish this. Also, by creating this position, it will remove the current Director of Public Works and he will fill the part-time Parish Engineer position with no benefits, retirement or insurance, thus saving the residents of Natchitoches Parish money, and will have nothing else to do with the Road Maintenance Department.



The council also passed an ordinance that will change the order of business at the Council meetings. Beginning with the June 19, 2017 meeting, the public will be allowed to speak on agenda-related items only during the course of the meeting. There will be a three minute maximum time allowance for each person to speak per agenda item, and it will be strictly enforced. Any person wishing to speak on non-agenda items will be allowed to speak after all items on the agenda are heard and addressed in their proper order at the end of the meeting.

Thank you for taking time to listen and understand that we are here to serve you. Thank you and may God richly bless you!

Sincerely,

Russell Rachal
District 5 Council Member

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Local Artist Shares His "Golden Images"

by Tommy O'Con

Jimmy Golden was born on November 19, 1963 in the small village of Pleasant Hill, Louisiana to Jim L. And Ruth Golden. His education began at a public school in Pleasant Hill and he later attended a commercial art school in Shreveport, LA.

Jimmy works all week at his family owned business, Golden's Hamburgers in Pleasant Hill. In his spare time, he loves to use his God-given talent which is drawing and oil painting. "My mother told me that I started drawing at the young age of three, drawing turtles and fish", Golden stated.



As Jimmy grew older his love for drawing grew stronger and he began to draw portraits of individuals along with his nature scenes which consist mostly of swamps and wildlife. According to Golden it takes 14 - 18 hours to complete a graphite pencil drawing and 2 - 3 days to complete an oil painting. "I start an oil painting and will go into a room for two or three days without eating or drinking in order to remain focused on my projects," Golden said.

When drawing a portrait, Jimmy focuses mainly on both the number of wrinkles and character in the individuals face. The more wrinkles and character, the better.

Jimmy is also an expert in oil paintings by taking several pictures of the subject and putting them all together to make one unique painting. His oil paintings consist mainly of swamp and wildlife.

Jimmy invites everyone to visit Golden Hamburgers where you can take a look at his Golden Images. Prints are available for purchase as well. Call 318-471-4565 for more information.



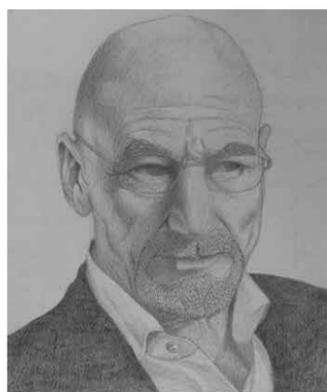
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Toledo Bend Fishing Report

by pro guide, Joe Joslin

Hello, Anglers. I fished around numerous BassHello, anglers and outdoor addicts. It's almost summer on my favorite fishing hole and those fun summer fishing patterns are beginning to work. There's always plenty of sunshine this month and for those who enjoy getting a tan and water skiing the weather couldn't be better. As a fisherman, I prefer a little cloud cover and even a light, misty rain shower. One important factor in fishing this month.....you have gotta get out of bed early, drink a quick cup of coffee and be on the lake at the first hint of daylight. The first two hours of fishing in the summer could result in 75% of your catch for the day.

REMINDER: SECURE YOUR TRASH

A reminder to all of us is to secure our trash. Throwing an empty can or empty plastic water bottle over in the bed of the truck or the bottom of the boat doesn't get it done. As soon as you head down the lake/road these items will fly out of the boat/truck and on to the lake or roadside. I see so much trash on our beautiful lake and roadsides because some are not taking the effort to secure our trash. Have a 100% trash rule in your boat or vehicle.....all of my trash is going into a trash can. Our children/youth will also see our efforts and they too will grow up to take care of their trash.

LAKE CONDITIONS: The lake is beautiful plus there's wildlife in abundance so make sure you take time to observe. At press time the lake level is 171.2' with two generators running one hour during weekdays. Water temperatures are in upper 70s.

HYDRILLA UPDATE: Toledo has been basically barren of hydrilla of nearly two years. Hydrilla is a dense, submerged grass that serves as an excellent habit for bass since most of Toledo's trees/stumps have rotted through the years. Bass thrive in hydrilla. I have some good news for bass anglers in that I am finding more and more of the plant which leads me to be encouraged that we may get our hydrilla back. I found a new area of the grass recently which was maybe 1/3 of an acre that was loaded with hydrilla with some as deep as 14 feet. We also caught two bass there.

FISHING REPORT/BASS: There remains a lot of bass in shallow areas so shallow patterns continue to catch fish but not as many as last month. Also, deep patterns (Carolina Rigs/drop shot/deep diving crankbaits) are starting to really improve and we are beginning to find larger numbers of bass together. Our biggest bass last month came off a drop shot rig with a Berkley Havoc Bottom Hopper in 14 feet of water. The place where the bass was located was on top of a main lake ridge.

We continue to throw a Texas rigged Bottom Hopper which we are fishing it from 4 to 25 feet using a sinker from 1/8 to 1/2 oz. depending on conditions. Top water patterns are definitely improving and one of my favorite top water baits is a Gunfish which is a slender bait with a feathered tail. The bait has great action and with the slender design you can easily make long casts to feeding bass. I seldom throw a topwater lure that doesn't have a feathered tail. The best feathered tail is a real feather and not a synthetic one. If your bait has a fake tail feather you can purchase the real deal usually in a package of two (white) for about \$6 which also comes with a top quality treble hook.

We also are using more frogs with Stanley's Ribbit and Top Dog my favorites. The extra foot of water on the lake has helped the frog bite as well as other floating weightless Texas rigs. Top weightless Texas rigs include Senkos, Berkley Power Jerk Shad and Flukes. One of my favorite schooling lure is a Power Jerk Shad and Fluke in pearl

CRAPPIE: Crappie guide, Jack Adams, says fishing remains excellent on his brush piles with limits every day. Also, anglers are catching lots of crappie under Pendleton Bridge both during the day as well as night. Live shiners and 1/16 crappie jigs are top baits.

Joe Joslin is a syndicated writer and is published by numerous websites, newspapers and magazines plus is a pro guide on Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn and a TPWD licensed guide since 1998. Contact at joejoslinoutdoors@yahoo.com, 337-463-3848/409-565-1288 and website www.joejoslinoutdoors.com.



Author/Guide Joe Joslin with a 9.8 pound largemouth trophy caught a few weeks ago while using a drop shot with Havoc Bottom Hopper.

As You Think

by Pastor Jim Manning

Ever heard the phrase "your life moves in the direction of your most dominant thought"? This is not just a true statement, but also a principle of God's Word. When we think on the right things, we will receive the right results. God made us in such a way that our physical and emotional health follow the way we think.

Romans 8:6 says, "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." That's a law of God. Our emotions follow our thoughts. We can't experience peace if we are constantly meditating on things that are contrary to God—things like hatred, strife, and ungodliness. We must do more than pray for peace; we must learn to keep our thoughts centered on God and His Word.

The Word has much to say about what we focus our thoughts on. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Prior to that verse, this passage tells us to rejoice and take everything to God in prayer. Then, the peace of God will keep our hearts and minds through Christ (Phil. 4:4-7). As we keep our minds focused on God instead of meditating on our troubles, His peace can fill us. God will keep "in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on [Him]..." (Isaiah 26:3). It is up to US to stay focused on the right things.

What happens when we choose not to focus our minds on the things of God? If we think on negative things, we will reap negativity. Let's take it a step further. What we allow to feed our minds will effect what we experience. We can't watch television shows that feed us depression and expect to operate in joy. We can't take in all the bad news without strengthening unbelief. If we want pure hearts, we can't watch movies that are full of adultery, fornication, and taking God's name in vain. Just like what we feed our bodies effects our physical health, what we feed our minds has a great effect on our emotional and spiritual health.

God has given us the prescription for living a life of peace and victory, but many times we fail to follow the Great Physician's orders. Imagine that a doctor prescribes a certain medication to take daily for treatment of a medical condition, but you choose not to take the medicine. Then, you get upset at the doctor about your treatment, saying it's no good and doesn't work. Since you didn't take the medicine, you have no right to criticize the doctor! You didn't cooperate with the prescribed treatment.

God has given us a treatment. He has prescribed the gospel, intended for daily consumption! He sent His Word to heal us and to deliver us from all our destruction (Psalms 102:20). His Word is health to all our flesh and life to those who find it (Proverbs 4:22). Many people are praying for help while violating the Physician's instructions. They aren't taking their medicine.

Most people think that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, but that's not completely true. We must read the whole verse to get the whole meaning. Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." That last phrase puts a limitation on the first one. God is not free to move in your life independent of you. He flows through people. He doesn't control our lives without our consent. There has to be power working on the inside of us-- specifically the power of faith. We must stir up faith within us to make it come alive!

This is how God's kingdom works. What we cultivate within our minds will set the course of our lives. As a man thinks in his heart, so he is (Proverbs 23:7). If we keep our minds on Christ, we will reap a harvest of peace, blessings, and assurance.



Pastor Jim Manning
The Life Church; Many, Louisiana

DOWNTOWN RIVERBANK CLOSURE

The City of Natchitoches would like to remind the public that due to construction for the Rue Beauport Riverfront Project, the downtown riverbank is closed to all vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The riverbank will remain closed to ensure the public's safety for the duration of the project.

Beau Jardin will remain open to the public during construction. The City of Natchitoches appreciates the public's patience while these improvements are being made.

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AND NEIGHBORS**

SHOP LOCALLY

Natchitoches Assisted Living - "Together We Make It Home"

by Tommy O'Con

Natchitoches Assisted Living is an assisted living facility located in Natchitoches, LA. The facility offers activities at its 1907 South Drive location for all residents to enjoy. These activities generally allow residents to maintain healthy lifestyles by encouraging movement and socializing with their peers.



Entrance sign to the facility.

Jo Davis moved from Ringgold, LA to the Natchitoches facility approximately six months ago. Upon arriving she immediately discovered a vacant flower bed that had much potential. Being a former licensed florist, she immediately captured the idea of planting flowers for all residents to enjoy.

She purchased petunias, verbenas and a variety of other type plants and proceeded with the project.



Picture of the flower garden.

According to Jo, it took approximately two months to develop the garden and she, along with other residents, labored daily until the garden began to bloom. Many of the residents and staff find themselves sitting on the back patio near the garden enjoying the beauty and peaceful setting.

Being able to utilize their skills becomes an important part of many people's lives and Natchitoches Assisted Living offers common spaces indoor and outdoors to support that need. If you are ever in the area, drop by and see the beautiful flower garden created by God above with the help of Jo Davis and others.



Pictured L to R: Residents Pat Holland, Juanita Wall and Jo Davis.

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Peason Ridge Tour of 2017

by Rickey Robertson

Peason Ridge is a land filled with history and a land filled with the heritage of the brave men and women who settled these lands beginning in 1818 and who lived on their beloved farms until 1941 when the U.S. government used eminent domain to force all these 29 homestead families and 35 sharecropper families off their beloved lands. Located on Peason Ridge are Native American sites, historical locations of home sites, other sites where historical events took place, turpentine and logging camps, cemeteries, creeks, roads used by the stagecoaches and even the Confederate Army, and the last vestige of our heritage, the wild horses of Peason Ridge. A wonderful place to tour and to visit. Each year the JRTC and Fort Polk partner with the Cultural Resources Section at Fort Polk to allow Heritage Families and visitors to attend a free tour of this historic area. And every year we have a large group who attends the tour.

On Saturday April 1, 2017 nearly 50 people gathered at Pine Grove Baptist Church to go on this tour. Our ancestors who settled and lived on Peason Ridge so many years ago had to overcome many obstacles as they lived and worked this land. Well, remember it was April Fool's Day and everyone who had gathered to attend the tour found out we had a problem. The Army had not sent the tour bus to Peason for us! Our ancestors adapted, overcame, and improvised so why couldn't we also. Tour guide Rickey Robertson advised the group that we were going to continue the tour and if they would follow in their vehicles we would still visit this historic area. 45 people loaded up in their personal vehicles and followed Rickey and the tour began. At the Peason Forward Landing Zone the peo-



The Peason Ridge tour group visiting Peason Memorial Park where they viewed the two historical markers and photo kiosks. (Robertson Collection)

ple were able to see the airstrip where large Air Force cargo aircraft such as C-130's and C-17's land to bring in supplies and ammunition to the army units going through a rotational training cycle. And they got to see the parachute drop zone around the airstrip where parachute units land when they jump into Peason Ridge.

As the group continued its journey at the site known as the Prairie since it looks like the open prairie lands of the American midwest, the group got to see several big turkey gobblers in full strut and some hens, and just a little father up the road, a sight I had not seen in many years. Coming across the road was a full covey or bobwhite quail.

Wow, what beautiful wildlife in such a beautiful location! Upon arrival at the Merritt Cemetery the group were able to see this well-kept cemetery where Edmond Merritt and Robert Conner are buried along with their wives. These 2 Peason Ridge settlers were both decorated Confederate soldiers who came back home and raised a family and helped their neighbors. Also pointed out were the old homesites of Rollie West and Reverend Young Prewitt, whom Prewitt Chapel Baptist Church is named after. We passed by the site of the large turpentine still site and it had special meaning to several of the Heritage Family members on the tour since their grandfather and grandmother lived in a "skid shack" while working at this site. And as we crossed Dowden Creek and went on a ways, we came to the location where Cold Springs School was once located in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Special meaning to me since my grandfather had attended this school. From this school evolved present day Cold Springs Baptist Church. Upon arrival at the large live fire village known as the SACON Village, M/Sgt. Fields explained all the various types of training conducted at that location. The group could see the bullet holes and devastation to these buildings. And as soon as we were able to leave, a group of infantrymen were to begin a walk-through of the village prior to an attack. After viewing the Dowden/ Owers/ Sanders dipping vat we toured the West Trench area used by the army to teach units on how to assault fortified positions. While at this location the tour group was able to see two beautiful wild stallions fighting for territory rights. A sight most



Peason Ridge Forward Landing Zone control tower. The tower is located near the airstrip and parachute drop zone. (Robertson Collection)



The Merritt Cemetery is located on Peason Ridge Military Reservation and the tour group visited this historic cemetery. (Robertson Collection)

was able to see two beautiful wild stallions fighting for territory rights. A sight most

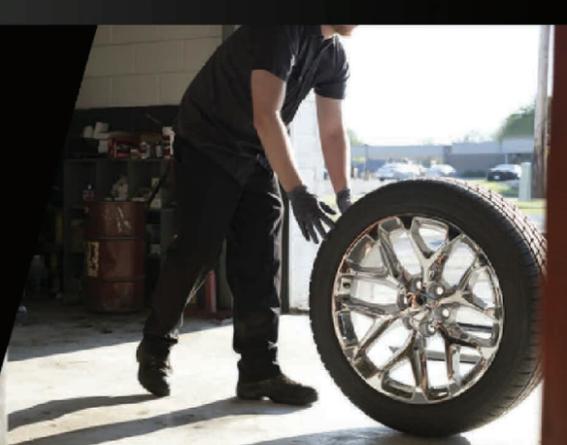


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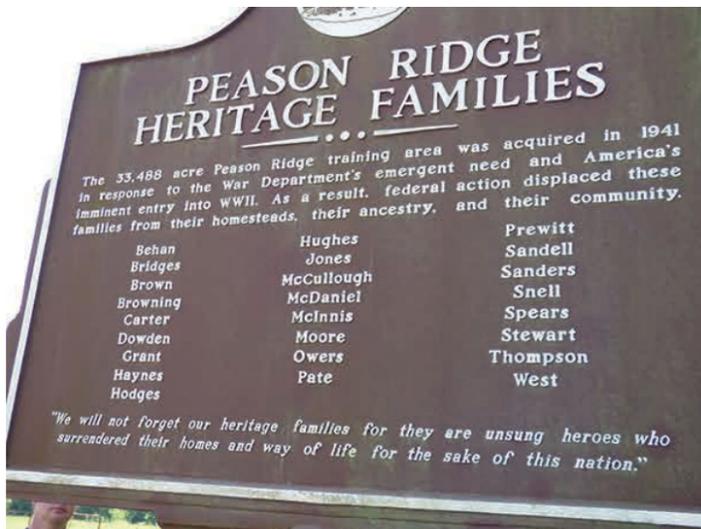
people have never witnessed and this group got to see first hand. Throughout the tour the group witnessed many of the beautiful horses on the range and many pictures of these wonderful animals were taken. Even the soldiers love the horses! One thing several of the folks told me that was so interesting to them was the many varied types of terrain located here and that there were 3 major watersheds that were filled by the water sources located on Peason Ridge. These three watersheds are the Sabine River, Calcasieu, and Red Rivers. And they were also able to be shown where each parish was located and of the many sites of historical interest located in each. Natchitoches, Sabine, and Vernon Parishes provide the lands for this large training area that has now been expanded from 33,000 acres to over 75,000 acres with the army obtaining over 42,000 more acres of land in the last year or so.

We traveled several more miles and came to the Spears Village. It is in the Digital Target Range and the people were able to see the area where the original settlers set aside 16 sections of land where all the livestock could graze. This is a beautiful area with a new assault village being built there. One the way to this site we passed the old Army Pond and one of the ladies on the tour, Shielda Wilson had a special story about this pond. As a young girl she had been baptized along with several more folks in this pond by Rev. M.C. Green, when he was pastor of the Peason UPC Church. So many stories and remembrances by every person who attended about an experience of their families or of an incident they were involved in. A way of life remembered and never forgotten!



The Old Army Pond located on Peason Ridge. This is the pond that Shielda Wilson, who attended the tour, was baptized in many years ago. (Robertson Collection)

Our last stop on the tour was at the Peason Memorial Park located on Hwy. 118. This park has 2 historical markers and photo kiosks for the public to visit. One historical marker is in memory and honor of the sawmill town of Peason and the other marker is in memory and honor of the heritage Families of Peason Ridge. The ancestors of the Heritage Families were pleased to stand and have their pictures made at the historical marker honoring their families and the way of life that was lost by these families. A very enjoyable day for all those who came out for this tour. And let us always remember the sacrifice made by the Peason Ridge and Camp Polk Heritage Families as they gave up their homes, farms, culture, and way of life so that our freedoms could be preserved.



Historical marker at Peason Memorial Park dedicated to the Peason Ridge Heritage Families. (Robertson Collection)



Rickey Robertson, tour guide for the Peason Ridge Tour, explains the area around Eagle Hill and the Forward Landing Zone to the group. (Robertson/Langlois Collection)



The Peason Ridge Tour group arrives at the Merritt Cemetery location on Peason Ridge Military Reservation. (Robertson Collection)



Around the Town is published and distributed on the first day of each month. Five thousand FREE copies are available in more than 50 locations in Natchitoches & Sabine Parishes. It may be viewed online at no charge at www.AroundTheTown.us.

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Around The Town

Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church Begins 146th Year

In traveling through the Town of Many, one cannot help but notice the small, historic Catholic church, Saint John the Baptist that is centrally located downtown. Its Spanish architecture is impressive, a reminder of the history of the area.

The first Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church in Many had its first beginnings before an actual church building was constructed.

Records indicate that Rev. Francois Levezouet, a Frenchman, was among a group of 12 young men recruited for work in the U.S. The former president of Saint Joseph's College in Natchitoches, Rev. Levezouet took a personal interest in Many and the community and was the first Catholic priest to come to Many and the surrounding area in 1865. He was sent from the Cathedral of Natchitoches and came to Many three or four times each year. Since there was no church building erected, he said his first mass at Many in the home of John Baptist Vandegaer in 1865. His visits continued until 1873. Sadly, he was one of the heroes of the yellow fever epidemic of Shreveport and died on October 8, 1873 at age 42.

The name Saint John the Baptist was chosen for the church in honor of the men who were interested in building the first Catholic church in Many: John Seldon Davis, John Baptiste Vandegaer and John Gilbert Buvens.

Toward the end of 1870, Bishop Auguste Martin, Bishop of the Diocese of Natchitoches (of which St. John's was part of) assigned Father Joseph A. Aubree as the first resident pastor of Many, extending his services over the entire parishes of Sabine, Vernon and part of Natchitoches Parishes.

Desiring to build a church, Mr. E. C. Davidson, a non-Catholic attorney, graciously donated land for the building. The first Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church was constructed in 1871. The frame building was 30' X 60'.



The first Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church was constructed in 1871.

Eventually, Father Aubree did not think the location was suitable and a land exchange was made. He was then presented with another donation from Florien Giaque, a non-Catholic lawyer from Ohio and major landowner. Giaque donated 25 acres adjoining the first church. The Act of Donation document stated that Mr. Giaque, "in consideration of love and affection and his desire for morality and his high regard for the Catholic Church.... donated the property for the use and purpose of a Catholic Church and Catholic graveyard and dwelling"

Thus, the beginnings of Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church in Many unfolded. The year 2017 marks the 145th Anniversary of the Many church and the beginning of its 146th year.



Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church burned on August 2, 1923. Shown are Rev. Vanderburg and William H. Vandegaer surveying the ruins.



Wishing our friends and church family at Saint John the Baptist all the best on this milestone 146th Anniversary where God's Word has been proclaimed, Sacraments have been celebrated, and families have grown together!



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The 2017 Saint John the Baptist First Communion Class

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We wish Father Michael Thang'wa a Happy 45th Birthday and a Happy 7th Anniversary of Ordination! Congratulations to Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church Parish on observing their 146th Anniversary!

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St. John's Early Catholic Settlers - Early Catholic settlers of Many were photographed in a group in the early 1900's. Shown are, top row: Coda Robinson, Roy Robinson, Maggie Ferguson, Belle Davis, Nina Vandegaer, Annie DeKeyzer, Myrtle Walker and Will Robinson. Second row: Ada Walker, Jim Buvens, Rolla Robinson, Trueheart Cannon, Anita Andries, Winnie Davis, Leatie Robinson, Gertrude Buvens, Edwin Hatcher, May Davis, Jessie Grappe and Bud DeLatin. Third row: Jewel Fielder, Maggie Hatcher, Leonie Andries, Edna DeKeyzer, Eloise Cannon, Pearl Grappe, Bessie Grappe, Future Walker, Annie Clair Vandegaer, Leo Vandegaer, Emmet Armstrong, Gilbert Andries, Joe Clannan, Francis DeKeyzer, Carl Van Hess, Tom Vandegaer and Dewey Hatcher. Fourth row: Milton Belisle, Joe Buvens, J.B. Vandegaer, Alice Davis, Lurine Fielder, Cecil Vandegaer, Jimmie Valdwell, John Vandegaer, Jow Clannan, Blake Andries, Gandy Davis, unidentified, Maebelle Belisle, unidentified, Thelma Belisle, Inez Hatcher, Tessie Andries, Alma Andries, unidentified and Sarah Vandegaer.



Saint John the Baptist Statue - Gracing the entrance of the present-day church is the statue of its namesake, Saint John the Baptist.



St. John's Catholic School - The Saint John's Catholic School is pictured in 1966. The school closed in May 1975.

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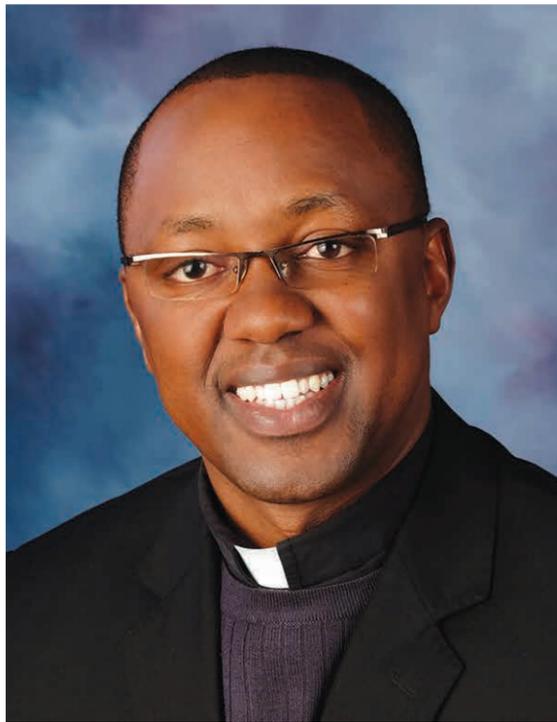
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- Father Louis Lambertz 1897-1898
- Father A. Anseeuw 1898-1906
- Father Q. Vanderburg 1906-1926
- Father John Nolan 1926-1929
- Father Robert Maure 1929-1933
- Father M. L. Plauche 1933-1935
- Father J. A. Benoit 1935-1951
- Father Richard Gremillion 1951-1964
- Father William Kwaaitaal 1964-1968
- Monsignor T. J. Lennon 1968-1975
- Father Gustave Bergeron 1975-1984
- Father Kenneth A. Williams 1984-1991
- Monsignor Norman Buvens 1991-1995
- Father William Carey 1995-1998
- Father John D. Pardue 1998-2005
- Fr. Joseph A. Martina, Jr 2005-2014
- Fr. Thomas Elavunkal, 2014-2016
- Fr. Michael Thang'wa 2016-

**FIRSTS FOR SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST
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- The first Catholic settlers immigrated to Sabine Parish from Belgium in the late 1830's.
- The first Mission Catholic priest, Father John Francois LeVezuet, came to Many in 1865 from the Immaculate Conception rectory in Natchitoches. However, he made only three or four visits per year. He died in the Yellow Fever epidemic in Shreveport in 1874.
- Father John Francois Le Vezuet said the first mass in Many in 1865 in the home of John B. Vandegaer.
- In 1870, the first resident priest, Father J. A. Aubree came to Many.
- Early in 1871, the first church, a 30 X 60-foot frame building was started.
- The first baptism recorded in the sacramental register of Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church is for Joseph Rivers and took place on March 3, 1871.
- Rev. Aubree conducted the first marriage in April 1871 between Christofer Parillo, minor son of Louis Parillo and Eliza Keutero and Victorian Procell, a minor daughter of Juan Procella and Helen Bison.
- The first confirmation was administered in Many in 1879. It is thought to have been Rt. Rev. Bishop Martin who administered the sacrament of confirmation. Receiving the sacrament were William H. Vandegaer, Leo Clannan, Jennie Abinton, Thomas DeLatin, Julia DeLatin, Belle Buvens, Henry Buvens, Thomas Buvens, Corie Lunt, Mrs. Lorena Vandegaer and Mrs. Mary Summers.
- Miss Emma Currie, who later married Leo Vandegaer, became the first teacher in 1887.
- Sister M. Beatrice Bind and Sister M. Lucy Sheehan were the first Sisters of Divine Providence to staff the Many school.





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To Rev. Michael Thang'wa: We wish you a Happy Birthday and a Happy Anniversary of Ordination. Thank you for your service to God's people.

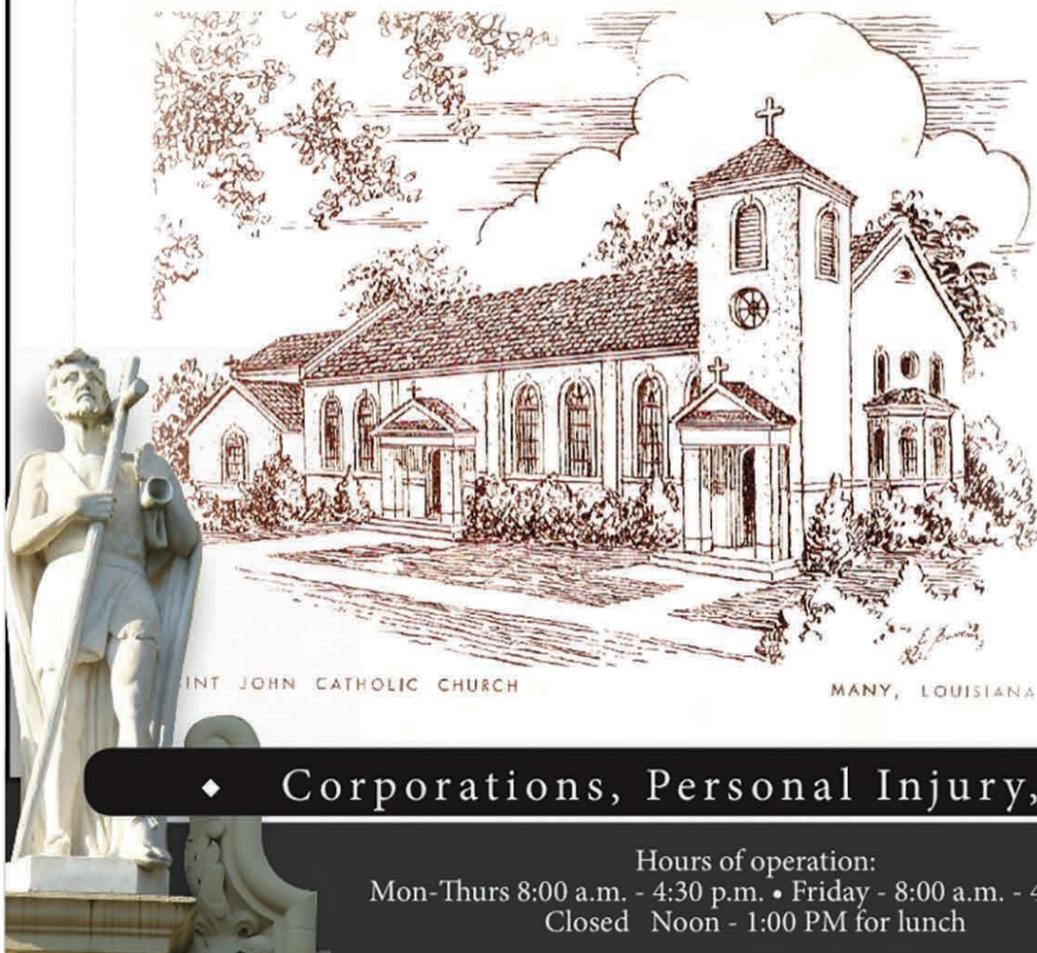


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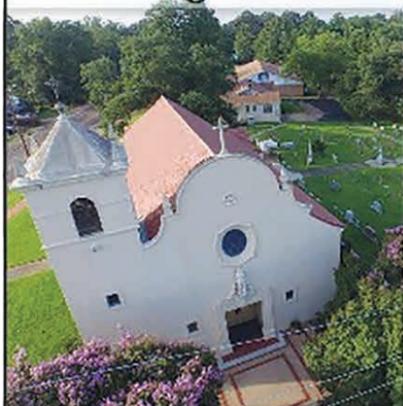
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From Rev. Francois Levezouet in 1865 to Rev. Michael Thang'wa in 2017



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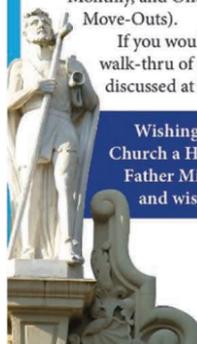
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Wishing our parish family at Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church a Happy Anniversary. We also congratulate our pastor, Father Michael Thang'wa on his Anniversary of Priestly Ordination and wish him a Happy Birthday!

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Around the Town would like to congratulate Dr. Chris Maggio on his appointment as the 19th president of Northwestern State University. Maggio is a lifelong resident of Natchitoches and long-time faculty and staff member at Northwestern. We wish him all the best!

Goodbye to the Hills, Once Toro and Later Emerald

by *All Things Sabine*

First, it was Hodges Gardens Motor Inn, just across the highway from the magnificent Hodges Gardens. It was created and designed specifically to complement Hodges Gardens...which in the 60s was such a heavy tourist attraction that a nearby hotel (okay, motel) and restaurant was needed.

Not just wanted, but needed.

And an accompanying golf course was perfect for the men who might tend to be bored with the Gardens.

During the mid or late 1990s, businessman Steve Alford purchased Toro Hills and it became Emerald Hills. Alford's purchase of Toro Hills was a good thing, it seemed, because before he bought it, the rumblings about the area were that Toro Hills would be shutting down. Alford managed to keep Toro Hills alive and thoroughly enjoyable, even with its new name of Emerald replacing the Toro. It seems he made a really good go of it, and there were times it seemed that the former Toro Hills would make a comeback...maybe never to its glory days, but a comeback nonetheless.

But then the State of Louisiana funded the construction of a rival golf course on Toledo Bend Lake and a hotel as well...Actually an entire resort, complete with club house restaurant, hotel restaurant, condominiums, ballrooms and meeting spaces and much, much more.

There were many who said Emerald Hills wouldn't have a chance once Cypress Bend Golf Resort was opened. And perhaps it didn't have a chance. To his credit, though, Alford, who lived in neighboring Vernon Parish but had plenty of roots in Sabine Parish, gave Emerald Hills a fighting chance to survive.

The Emerald Hills Golf Course held on to several dozen die hard golfers who hung in there and stayed loyal and supportive. The restaurant largely attracted the nearby residents of Florien but not so many diners beyond. The motel seemed to usually have far more vacancies than occupancies. One of the two swimming pools

was closed for much of the summer times.

I can only imagine the expense that must have been involved in operating Emerald Hills would have required tremendous patronage. Without that patronage, Alford was unable to continue to maintain some of the features of Emerald Hills... such as two pools and two fully lighted tennis courts. The hotel rooms were approaching 40 years of age and were in need of serious renovations. But with occupancy as it was, costly renovations were out of the question. The cut backs and lack of needed renovations fed a vicious cycle which in turn further negatively effected the patronage Emerald Hills was getting, or rather, as it came to be, not getting.

Then some Chinese investment group purchased Emerald Hills, stating they were going to turn it into a golfing school of some sort. They didn't. Instead, they began renting the villas there by the month. They quit maintaining the golf course. They closed the hotel. They closed the grille. They closed everything.

From what I understand, about four or five years ago, a businessman from Florida with roots in Florien offered to buy Emerald Hills. He was willing to pay a healthy price for the property, and he was financially able to as well. But the owners refused to sell.

And so it sits there. Doing nothing. Except rotting. All of it. And this pretty much seems to be the end of the story of the little resort that once was.



Postcard for Toro Hills Motel. Contributed by **All Things Sabine**.

LSMSA Remains As Top Performing School

The Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts in Natchitoches has been recognized once again as one of the 25 top-performing high schools with elite students in the nation by the Washington Post.

Jay Mathews, an education columnist and blogger for the Washington Post, released his annual list on Friday, May 5.

The 25 schools were set aside from the Washington Post's America's Most Challenging High School list because, "despite their exceptional quality, their admission rules and standardized test scores indicate they have few or no average students."

"Sophomores, juniors and seniors who survive the tough admissions process at LSMSA live at the boarding school, which was established by the state legislature in 1982," commented Mathews.

"I am so proud that LSMSA continues to lead the nation in student performance," said Dr. Steve Horton, executive director. "Our student body sets high goals for themselves, and their accomplishments and accolades reflect this."

"I must also commend the faculty and staff of LSMSA for nurturing our students so that they are able to realize their dreams."

Also included on the list were LSMSA sister schools in Arkansas, Illinois, North Carolina and Oklahoma.

Students apply during either their freshman or sophomore year for the opportunity to attend LSMSA for their final two or three years of high school. Consideration is also given to students who apply only to attend LSMSA for their senior year.

The school remains unique among the nation's public residential schools in offering a core curriculum of study in math, science, the humanities and the creative and performing arts. The accelerated curriculum includes traditional college-level courses as well as specialized electives and opportunities for independent study and research.

Since the first class commencement in 1985, more than 4,600 graduates have been prepared for success in college, ultimately taking positions of leadership and service in a variety of careers throughout Louisiana, the nation and even internationally.

LSMSA employs an exceptional faculty committed to teaching, mentoring and supporting its young scholars. Of the 37 full-time faculty members, 75 percent

hold a Ph.D. or terminal degree, and all faculty are required to hold a master's degree in the areas they teach.

Students are required to take at least six courses per semester, which are taught on a traditional college semester system. Students wishing to go beyond LSMSA's formal course requirements may undertake a program of independent research and study, which will result in their achieving the school's highest level curriculum, Graduation with Distinction.

All universities in the University of Louisiana system have articulation agreements with LSMSA which award direct college credit for more than 90 of the school's courses.

For more information about LSMSA and what it has to offer call 800-259-3173.



Photo Courtesy of LSMSA

The Other Natchitoches Inspired Movie

“The Man in the Moon” and NHS student Gwen Kingrey

by Dean Lambert



Gwendell Desmond Kingrey was a 16 year old junior that was looking forward to the upcoming football season at Natchitoches High School. His friends knew him as “Gwen,” but later movie goers would know him as “Court Foster,” the boy that Dani Trant (Reese Witherspoon) & Maureen Trant (Emily Warfield) fell in love with in the 1991 movie, “The Man in the Moon.”

Gwen was killed instantly on July 9, 1959 after falling from a tractor in Natchitoches Parish near Clarence. The accident occurred about 9 a.m. in a pasture where Kingrey and another youth were each driving a tractor pulling large mowers cutting grass.

One wheel of Kingrey’s tractor apparently struck a stump causing the vehicle to lurch and throw the youth beneath the bush-hog blades.

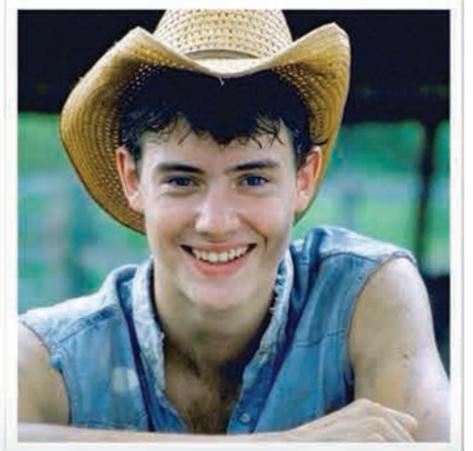
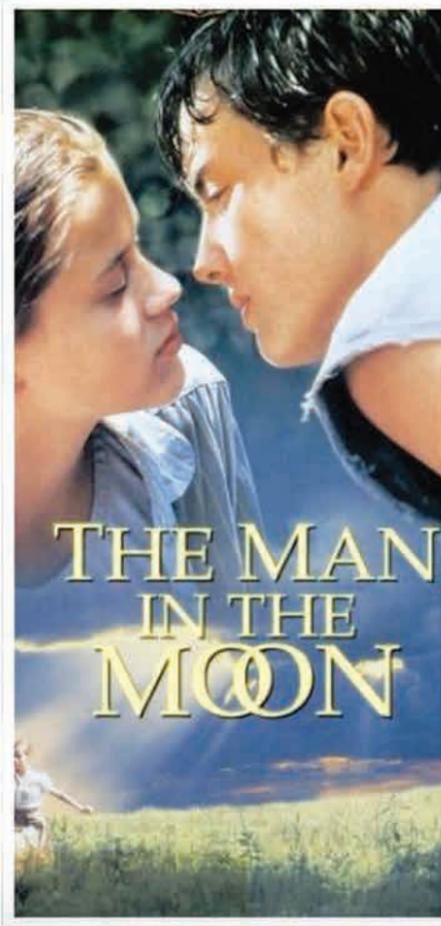
Funeral services for Gwen were officiated by the Rev. A. E. Wingfield. The Rev. Wingfield was the father of the movie’s screenwriter, Jenny Wingfield. Jenny wrote the play and was portrayed as “Dani” in the movie, while her dad was portrayed by Sam Waterston. Jenny based the play on her youthful life experiences living in Robeline where both her family and the Kingrey family lived at the time. Much of the movie was filmed in Robeline where her dad was once pastor.



Jenny Wingfield, the movie’s screenwriter, with long-time friend and *Around the Town* publisher, Tommy O’Con. (Photo by Tommy O’Con)

Gwen was buried in the Fort Jessup Cemetery. Survivors include his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Kingrey; two brothers, Donald and Ronald Kingrey; grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Maricelli of Fort Jessup and Mrs. E. E. Kingrey of DeQuincy.

Note: The family moved to Sabine Parish after the death of Gwen. His twin brothers graduated from Many High School with one of them later returning from a tour in Vietnam and working for both the Many Police Department & the Sabine Sheriff’s office. Scenes in the movie were filmed in downtown Many, La., the old Robeline Methodist Church, the Robeline Cemetery and the nearby Bob Welch farm. Other scenes were at the Natchitoches Country Club, the Cane River bank, a house down Cane River across Pratt’s near Point Place (Trant house) and at Kisatchie Falls just off Hwy. 118.



Pictured clockwise from left: *Man in the Moon* movie poster; Gwendell Desmond Kingrey; Jason London, known as Court Foster in the movie. (Photos by Dean Lambert)



Old Historic Robeline Methodist Church, one of the film sites. (Photo by Tommy O’Con)

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Arthur to Represent Louisiana

Connor Arthur is a Louisiana 4-H State Shooting Sports Ambassador and will represent Louisiana at the 2017 National 4-H Shooting Sports Teen Ambassador Institute in Florida.

The 2017 National 4-H Shooting Sports Teen Leadership Institute has selected 30 youth from 17 different states to attend training for the National 4-H Shooting Sports Ambassador Program in Gainesville, FL this July and Connor was one of their choices. We congratulate Connor on this honor.





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by Tommy O'Con

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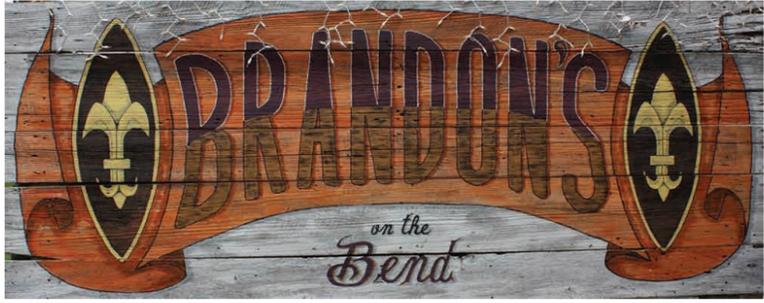
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Many Collision Center Staff:
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 Robeline, LA 71469 Ph 318.471.6948
aroundthetownla@aol.com
www.AroundTheTown.us

NRA Foundation Awards Grant to Sabine Parish Sheriff's Department

Sheriff Ronny Richardson and the Sabine Parish Sheriff's Department recently received notification that it has been chosen to receive a grant award totaling \$5600.00 to fund repairs and improvements to the Sabine Parish Shooting Range.

A supporter of the National Rifle Association, this is the second time that Richardson has been successful in securing funding for the repair and refurbishment of the Sabine Parish Shooting Range and to purchase needed equipment that the department's budget could not afford.

Because of this funding, youth groups, including 4-H, as well as Hunter Safety Education classes and deputies and police officers throughout the parish are able to utilize the facility.

Established in 1990, The NRA Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that raises tax-deductible contributions in support of a wide range of firearm-related public interest activities of the National Rifle Association of America and other organizations that defend and foster the Second Amendment rights of all law-abiding Americans. These activities are designed to promote firearm and hunting safety, to enhance marksmanship skills of those participating in the shootings sports, and to educate the general public about firearms.



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Around the Town Photo of the Month – Some moments require us to just stop what we're doing and breathe and wonder. That's what young Sebi is doing in this photo taken by his mom Auburn Smolij, which was chosen as our **Photo of the Month**. The photo was submitted by Sebi's aunt, Carrie Adams of Natchitoches, Texas.

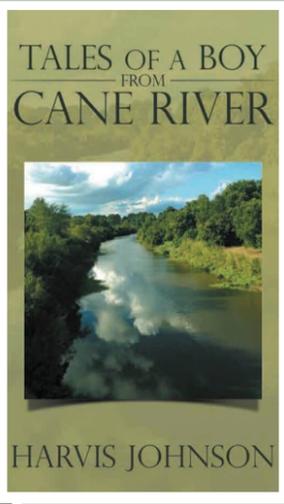
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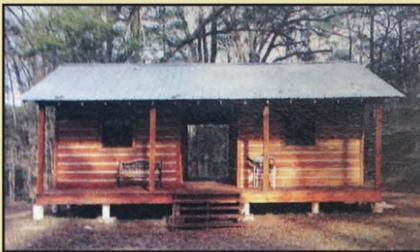


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