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Q1/2008



THE BIG IDEA

GSD&M'S Idea City emerges from a culture dive into South Louisiana with a brand for the I-10/12 Corridor

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A DIFFERENT PLACE

LSU architecture researchers peer at Perkins Road Overpass



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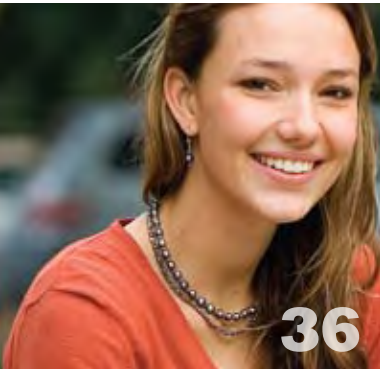
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It's an exciting time to live in Baton Rouge and Louisiana, a new year—another day to make a difference.

There's an energy of determination and renewal all along the I-10/12 Corridor—stretching from the Northshore to the east, through Baton Rouge and Lafayette, to

Lake Charles in the west.

It's that spirit, that culture of triumph and camaraderie—of music and food—that unites us, defines

aimed at branding the Corridor as the best place in America for talented, high-energy people to live and work.

As leaders in the areas of culture, entrepreneurialism and energy production, our communities are places that offer a unique, fulfilling quality of life—they are places where individuals can still make a difference.

In the coming months, Idea City will help the Foundation and others launch a full-scale marketing campaign to help tell our story. This work, we believe, will help retain young professionals and attract more new businesses and creative people to our communities.

To read more about the effort, flip over to page 16.

In other work, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the board members of the LRA Support Foundation for their daring, insightful leadership.

The LRASF was launched after Katrina and Rita to aid the state in the enormous planning and research necessary for our recovery.

Brenda Birkett, L. Ronald Forman, R. King Milling, John P. Laborde (chair), Sean E. Reilly and David R. Voelker have now concluded their work—which included the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan; Louisiana

Speaks Pattern Book and Tool Kit; local redevelopment plans in Lake Charles, Vermilion Parish and St. Bernard Parish; and a 230-page, comprehensive report on the state's health care system issued by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Their work was paid for with private funds and relied on the best planning minds in the world—including Duany Plater-Zyberk, Urban Design Associates and Fregonese Calthorpe and Associates.

It also included a little-known effort in Washington, D.C., to ensure that our state received the full federal funding needed to recover our

This work, we believe, will help retain young professionals and attract more new businesses and creative people to our communities.

us as a region and state.

Now, renowned marketing firm GSD&M's Idea City out of Austin, Texas, is helping us tell our story to the rest of the country and world.

This effort, based on hundreds of hours of research and interviews with people from across the Corridor, will help our communities and state regain some of the economic stability lost after Katrina and Rita.

In November—after studying our region for months, Idea City revealed their base concept for the I-10/12 brand: Energy for Life.

The Foundation funded the work, which is

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*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*

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communities.

That work—performed by Ketchum Communications—was known as the One Voice Campaign and included public affairs services and developing a unified message for our state's leaders to convey to Congress as they worked to secure crucial recovery funds.

As part of this effort, Ketchum guided our congressional representatives, senators, governor and other leaders as they appealed to Congress and the President for critical recovery funds.

I am happy to report that Congress has awarded our state the funds necessary to rebuild our communities—that includes an additional \$3 billion for the Road Home program and more than \$7 billion for levee and coastal restoration projects. In all, the state has received nearly \$50 billion from the federal government for relief and recovery efforts.

These six leaders, the board members who guided the LRASF, have made a new Louisiana possible. They are a great example for all of us—people who gave their time and energy for the good of us all, asking nothing in return.

Best wishes in the New Year,



Christel C. Slaughter, Ph.D.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is a community foundation that takes advantage of opportunities to improve the quality of life in the capital region. We do so by providing two essential functions. One, the Foundation connects philanthropists with capable nonprofits to make sure the needs of our communities are met. For example, our donors support the Shaw Center for the Arts and buy eyeglasses for needy children. Two, the Foundation invests in and manages pivotal projects to improve the region. Our Plan Baton Rouge initiative spearheaded the downtown revitalization plan and now is working to revive Old South Baton Rouge. For more information, contact Mukul Verma at mverma@braf.org.

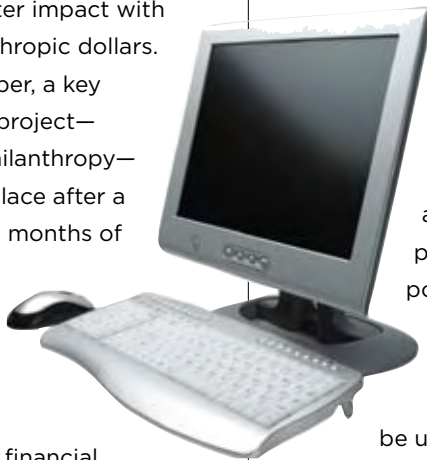
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Foundation offers web platform >>

The Foundation continues its strategy to provide more local information so donors can have a greater impact with their philanthropic dollars.

In November, a key gear in this project—Informed Philanthropy—was put in place after a feverish two months of fine tuning and killing bugs. The Foundation installed NorthStar, a financial software platform that was crafted by Stellar Financial from the firm's software for the biggest mutual funds, including Vanguard.

The NorthStar platform, now in use behind-the-



scenes by Foundation staff, is being introduced in phases to donors. Soon, they will be able to visit a secure website to check their real-time updated philanthropic fund balances, view research about local nonprofits, learn about community problems and potential solutions, and recommend how their funds should be used to cure ills and to move their causes forward.

The web portal will distinguish the Foundation, making it the sole online source of in-depth local knowledge for philanthropists across the region.

Offering the donor portal fits the Foundation's increased focus on solving problems. So does the elimination of the competitive grants program, which will free up \$800,000 toward solutions that reduce needs in the community by bettering lives.

The board voted to end the competitive grants program last year. •



Emily Smith, Kelli Stevens and Clarice Gordon with their children at the site of the Knock Knock Children's Museum on Dalrymple.

Who's There? Knock Knock >>

Kelli Stevens and her troops keep marching to the beat of the city's children. They are edging closer to building a children's museum in Baton Rouge.

The museum already has more than \$11 million in commitments. Stevens, chair of the museum board, says she is awaiting designs and renderings for the Knock Knock Children's Museum before another fund-raising push for the project, likely to cost more than \$15 million.

Haizlip Studios of Memphis is designing the children's

6 Soon, [donors] will be able to visit a secure website to check their real-time updated philanthropic fund balances, view research about local nonprofits, learn about community problems and potential solutions, and recommend how their funds should be used...

museum, which will marry learning to fun in a lively environment. Designers are expected to deliver renderings in February.

Haizlip has already sketched part of the Baton Rouge skyline. It was a design partner for Baton Rouge's Irene W. Pennington Planetarium. Nationwide, Haizlip has become one of the go-to firms for children's museums; the firm designed the Memphis Children's Museum and EdVenture Children's Museum in Columbia, S.C.

Knock Knock leaders are negotiating with BREC to build the museum in City Park, on land across from the golf course. BREC designated the Dalrymple Drive site as a destination building in the park's upgrade plan. •

Going west >>

Continuing to build philanthropy across Louisiana, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation has aligned with leaders in Lake Charles to grow the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana.

It's the second time in a year that the Foundation has extended beyond its service region to help build a community foundation. In 2007, the Northshore



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION *of Southwest Louisiana*

Foundation was launched to serve St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, St. Helena and Washington parishes. Already, the Northshore Community Foundation, governed by a board from the Northshore and run by Susan Bonnett, has raised more than \$12 million in assets.

Just as on the Northshore, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation will provide administrative support and expertise to the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, which will be governed by people in its service region and run by a CEO, who is expected to be hired this month.

"There will be strength in numbers," said David Reinauer, chairman of Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana and owner of Reinauer Real Estate of Lake Charles. "Together, the three foundations will provide solutions and improve the quality of lives across most of South Louisiana."

The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana serves

Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis, Beauregard and Allen parishes.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation knows Lake

Just as on the Northshore, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation will provide administrative support and expertise to the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana...

Charles. After Hurricane Rita, the Center for Planning Excellence, an offshoot of the Foundation, worked with the people of Lake Charles to provide a master plan for rebuilding that city's downtown area. Voters in Lake Charles have approved taxes to start a downtown revival based partly on the plan. •

The right path >>

The Baton Rouge parks system is searching for spots to build its first path under a new project, keeping in mind advice from Atlanta path guru Ed McBrayer—build the first trails where people see their value, making future paths easier to fund and build.

Lead planner Ted Jack of BREC is searching for three pilot projects and should have some prospective sites by the end of January. Though BREC wants to create a master path plan, it wants to move quickly to build the first paths and get the project going. The pilot trails will be integrated with the master plan, says Jack.

One of the favored locations by people attending BREC path meetings was Bayou Duplantier from the lakes to Lee Drive and beyond, but Jack says opposition already has developed among some landowners along the bayou.

In Atlanta, McBrayer has built paths despite vocal opposition because 85% of people want them in their backyards. McBrayer says people understand that paths create communities, provide a place to exercise, are an alternative transit network and even reduce crime.

BREC has at least \$4 million to start building paths, which are the most requested offering in the park system's surveys. •



One of the favored locations by people attending BREC path meetings was Bayou Duplantier from the lakes to Lee Drive and beyond...

by the Center for Planning Excellence, which did advance work by holding a number of gatherings before the session at Hemingbough.

Leading the comprehensive master plan for the parish is Fregonese Associates. The firm, already familiar with South Louisiana because it worked on the Louisiana Speaks master plan after Katrina, is expected to deliver a blueprint for West Feliciana within a year.

In West Feliciana, there was a common desire at the community meeting. The residents want to maintain green areas while concentrating new housing and retail in small towns. The destination city would remain St. Francisville, which the residents envision as having a lively main street and downtown.

After Fregonese completes the master plan, it will be debated and could be adopted by West Feliciana government. •

Looking better >>

Wanting to extend the funky lure of the Perkins Road Overpass, Commercial Properties is remaking the former Wal-Mart shopping center on Perkins Road into a village with retail and housing.

jammed into a meeting room at Hemingbough in late November, plotting their vision of the future by choosing where to put houses, stores and industrial structures on a parish map. Their preferences will be incorporated into a comprehensive master plan.

The meeting was facilitated

8 Planning West Feliciana >>

With a new bridge over the Mississippi headed in their general direction and more people choosing their verdant parish, the people of West Feliciana are busy managing the growth of their communities.

About 250 parish residents

“The project is nicely detailed and works well in its urban context.”

Shaw Center wins award

Competing against more than 800 entries, the Shaw Center for the Arts was among 13 buildings honored by the American Institute of Architects in its annual design contest.



Lead designer for the Baton Rouge building was Schwartz/Silver Architects. Associate designers were Eskew + Dumez + Ripple of New Orleans and Jerry M. Campbell & Associates of Baton Rouge.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation partnered with city and state governments, LSU and The Shaw Group to build the \$55 million arts center, which houses the LSU Museum of Art, the Manship Theatre, a retail store, restaurants and art galleries.

The AIA picked buildings for their beauty and social

impact.

“The project is nicely detailed and works well in its urban context,” writes the award jury. “You can look through the building to the historic water tower and the rooftop space is accessible to the public without visitors having to patronize the rooftop restaurant, creating another public and community space. The gallery spaces play off of the industrial nature of the parking garage across the street and the interior office spaces meld with the interior museum space, creating offices with interior channel glass walls.” •

A bridge so far

>> A few years ago, there was a movement to eliminate the pedestrian bridge that links the planetarium and the Baton Rouge River Center. The argument, articulated by Andres Duany, architect of the downtown plan, was this: Raise the bridge to drive pedestrian activity to where it belongs: the street. Also, the Planetarium was designed with the assumption that the walkway would be torn down.

The push was a nonstarter

with the Department of Public Works under a previous mayor. Instead, the city-parish cleaned the bridge and replaced the railings. Not much of an improvement, and certainly no comparison to the Chihuly Bridge of Glass, picked the top pedestrian bridge by *Urban Land* magazine.

Hundreds of Dale Chihuly’s glass sculptures are suspended in the Tacoma, Wash., bridge above an interstate and train tracks. The bridge connects downtown to the waterfront, which includes a museum of glass beside a residential development.

Federal, local and private contributions paid for the \$6.4 million, 500-foot span, which opened in 2002.

A world-renowned glass artist, Chihuly has been an economic generator for the region, which has become a center for glass blowing in America. •





BR Uncorked

>> What goes with a lush cabernet? Philanthropy.

The brainchild of seven local professionals, Baton Rouge Uncorked kicked off its first wine competition for charity in fall. The organization raised more than \$8,100 for Playmakers of Baton Rouge, a local theater group for young audiences.

The event produced an impressive turnout—guests filled the Shaw Center for the Arts' River Terrace to capacity. About 150

The organization raised more than \$8,100 for Playmakers of Baton Rouge...

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latecomers had to be turned away at the door. With such high attendance at the first tasting, it appears that founders Edmund Giering, Doug Allen, Doug Cochran, Patrick Coogan, Pete Bush, Luke Williamson and Miles Higgins have created a big success for good works.

They plan to unveil a different seasonal tasting four times a year. Although the basic format of each

Definition:

Donor Advised Fund – The most popular charitable fund offered by the Foundation. Donors create funds with as little as \$10,000 and recommend grants from the fund. The Foundation does the paperwork and oversees investment houses that manage charitable funds. Donors use earnings to recommend grants across the world.

party will stay the same, “the charity will change each time, the venue will change each time and the grape will change each time,” said Bush.

Guests give a minimum of \$20 to participate and members of the selected charity collect those proceeds directly at the door. The tasting also features a silent auction of items donated by local artists and businesses.

Sale of Baton Rouge Uncorked wine glasses, sponsorships and online advertising helps cover operations. Because of high start-up expenses, the founders fronted the full costs of the October party.

The group modeled itself after Louisville Uncorked in Kentucky, Bush and Allen's home state. Guests form teams of up to three people to participate in the wine tasting. Teams bring three bottles of their selected wine for the competition. Two bottles are shared among attendees for tasting; the third from every team is either awarded to the winners or used in the auction.

The next event is scheduled for mid- to late-February. Final details were unavailable at press time. For updates, visit www.batonrougeuncorked.com. •



Gwen Hamilton is among the believers.

Working with people who live in Old South Baton Rouge, she has led the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's project to revive the neighborhood between downtown and LSU—and Old South Baton Rouge is breathing again. With new homes replacing tired housing projects. With children studying at the new Head Start center and reading at the Carver Branch Library. With developers taking chances on a neighborhood once given up for gone.

Gwen's work is paid for by another set of believers—members of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. Their generosity lets the Foundation spark the creation of experimental public schools, celebrate literature and the arts, and put a shine on Old South Baton Rouge.

Join the believers.

Become a member by calling Helen Fisher at 225.387.6126 or visiting BRAf.org.

*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*

A Fine Balance

NANCY JO CRAIG RECYCLES COMPUTERS, GUSSIES UP DOGS FOR PARADES >> by OLIVIA WATKINS/
photos by LORI WASELCHUK

Walking through the Capital Area Computer Recycling Center's warehouse is like visiting faraway history—in computer years. Platforms are stacked, some 15 feet high, with used towers and monitors that have been donated to the center. Disowned Macs stand in a row, their monitors looking like eager faces searching for a new home.

In the center of this computer wonderland is Nancy Jo Craig, executive director of the center. Working with her staff and occasionally with students from St. Joseph's Academy, they refurbish computers and send them to nonprofits and schools around the region, and as far away as Mexico—where they change the lives of poor children and their parents in the city of Cordoba.

In 2004, Craig was hired to lead the center. It was a turning point for the organization. She changed operations and programming to overcome serious financial problems for the recycler.

Since, the recycling center has rebounded. It even played a substantial role in helping nonprofits and families affected by Hurricane Katrina. "We were able to collect and distribute over 3,000







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computers, over half of those to individuals,” Craig says. “If you don’t have a computer, how do you go back to business?”

The reverse beep-beep warning from forklifts mixes with the buzz of workers moving computers at the warehouse in downtown, near Pastime restaurant and lounge. Craig shows off the mountains

of equipment, which even include a tossed-out film editing machine from the days of reel-to-reel.

Donated by people and companies, equipment that passes tests is refurbished and sent for use in public schools or sold loaded with software to poor families for as little as \$50. Computers given up for dead are hauled off to be recast as new

products. The recycling center gets about \$15,000 per 18-wheeler load for equipment tagged as RIP.

Craig makes the difficult work sound incredibly simple.

She was well prepared for her job—a master’s in public administration from Harvard University and a life of public service. While finding her own path, Craig learned much from her family. Both of her parents set the stage, with her father, Frank S. Craig Jr., among the founders of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

The daughter started her life as a scientist, as a research assistant when the Coastal Ecology Lab at LSU made an alarming find. Working with first generation digital-mapping, the wetlands researchers discovered coastal Louisiana was vanishing into the gulf. Their subsequent warnings not to build in low-lying areas were ignored.

Thirty years later, Katrina deluged New Orleans East. “It was predictably going to come to ruin,” says Craig.

The discovery of land being swallowed by the water partly inspired her to join The Nature Conservancy. She worked to protect wetlands and wildlife habitats throughout North and South America. “I wanted to be a part of an organization that could act, that was a nonprofit which could actually go out and do conservation.”

She was chosen as executive director of The Nature Conservancy of Louisiana. “We created the first six or seven wildlife refuges in Louisiana.” One of those was the Bluebonnet Swamp, which was established partly with a grant from the Foundation and now is operated and owned by BREC.

From the work, it became clear that Craig could understand and approach issues of conservation locally and nationally. One local project was

BACK-UP SYSTEMS The Capital Area Computer Recycling Center has teamed with St. Joseph’s Academy, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation and Fondo Cordoba to install recycled computers in Mexico. Hundreds of computers are being used by Mexican schoolchildren and their parents in Cordoba, a town in the state of Veracruz.

with Susan Hamilton, director of the Baton Rouge Recycling Office. They launched Yard Smart Earth Wise, a campaign to encourage residents to use their grass clippings and yard debris as fertilizer to reduce waste.

Another project had Craig going to the dogs. With friend Adrienne Moore, she started the Mardi Gras Mystic Krewe of Mutts, a parade featuring canines that raises money to spay and neuter pets.

The Capital Area Animal Welfare Society now runs the parade, but Craig’s dog, a parade founder named T-Bone, still attends each year. The parade raised more than \$15,000 in 2006.

For Nancy Jo Craig, life is balanced. “I think that the crazy I’m busy sort of stuff is almost a disorder of our culture and that, over time, people will realize that having time to relax is more important. A few years ago, I had a treehouse built. And you know, it’s just for me.”

When coaching nonprofit executives, she teaches what she practices, telling them that “your life is OK, because that big problem you have now probably won’t be around in a few years, that your best moments should be personal.

“My proudest achievement in life is not work related, it’s my son.” •



THE BIG IDEA

IDEA CITY CREATES PURPOSE, BRAND TO DRAW BUSINESSES
TO THE 10/12 CORRIDOR >> by **MUKUL VERMA**

The businessman from Massachusetts was numb. Numb from the cold, from his work, from not knowing his neighbors. Numb, even, from the distance within his own family.

What he found on a visit to Louisiana was the opposite. People were alive, relished the balance between work and fun, kept their families close and made friends—and even extended family—out of strangers. Pulled by the life here, he didn't want to go back home.

He is not alone. So believes Haley Rushing, who headed a project for the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to create a purpose and brand for 12 parishes in a Corridor that lines interstates 10 and 12. Hearing a retelling of that dead-end life in the Northeast and meshing it

with her culture dive across the parishes, Rushing says there are many who would choose to live in the Corridor, pulled here by economic opportunities and a chance to make a mark in a state that is working to create a bright future.

“The world doesn't know Louisiana. It knows New Orleans, Mardi Gras and, unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina. It's time to let the world in on the rest of the story. The energy and vitality you

“We call it the Louisiana effect. People are reluctant to move here. But when they come, they gain 30 pounds and never want to leave.”

—Lafayette resident

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To bring energy to life



TIM MUELLER

“The energy and vitality you find along the Corridor is absolutely contagious and has the magnetism to draw the right people, spur the economy and create a new future for Louisiana...”

—Haley Rushing



LORI WASELCHUK



LSUSPORTS.NET



LORI WASELCHUK



LORI WASELCHUK

"Our culture is one of the few places where all of the aspects of the culture are integrated. The music sounds like the food smells like the people dance like the trees sway and the landscape lays."

—Lafayette musician

find along the Corridor is absolutely contagious and has the magnetism to draw the right people, spur the economy and create a new future for Louisiana," says Rushing, chief purposologist for GSD&M's Idea City.

Idea City, the Austin firm founded by Roy Spence and his friends, has helped build the Wal-Mart and Southwest Airlines brands. Last year, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation hired Idea City to provide a common purpose and brand for the parishes in the 10/12 Corridor Project.

Hiring the firm is part of the Foundation's goal to create the best place in America for talented, high-energy people to live and work by capitalizing on the momentum and quality of life along the Corridor.

Idea City's job was to find the unique advantage of the Corridor, create a purpose around the findings and offer a brand to promote what the firm discovered. The branding is one important segment of the Corridor initiative. The other is gathering the leaders and people from across the Corridor to foster new jobs and to boost wealth, replacing and surpassing the economy disrupted and destroyed by Katrina and Rita.

Together, the 12 parishes already were growing faster than the rest of the country, partly because their assets—such as five universities, advanced research centers and an enormous petrochemical base—were aligned along I-10, the main artery of commerce from Florida to California.

Shreveport demographer Elliott Stonecipher discovered the rise of the Corridor before most others. His analysis of 26 years of data showed that parishes along the interstates from the Sabine River to the Pearl were growing faster than the nation, and that one-third of all Louisiana residents live on the stretch. What's more, Stonecipher's research uncovered that the area had grown by more than 365,000 people since 1980.

Working with this information and other research and surveys about the 12 parishes, Rushing and her team immersed themselves in life along the Corridor. "We are more like therapists, like archaeologists than marketers," she says.

When they emerged, Rushing, Spence and Idea City staff had created a brand. In fall, at an event in the Shaw Center for the Arts, Idea City unveiled the brand: "To Bring Energy to Life."

Idea City discovered a unique energy for life that

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LORI WASELCHUK



LORI WASELCHUK



LORI WASELCHUK



LORI WASELCHUK

RENEWABLE ENERGY

To sum up its presentation in words, GSD&M's **Roy Spence** read a piece that echoed the brand for the Corridor.

"There is an energy here.

In the crack of a crawfish shell. The delirious hum of a distant zydeco band. The call of its invisible heart beats across the centuries. Houma Indian, French, English, Spanish, Creole, Cajun. All were drawn here. And all left their mark. Just as you have come to leave yours.

This ancient energy, flowing and alive, crackles in new ideas. Shines in new opportunities. It resounds in new voices joining old songs in a chorus of hope to the 21st century. A wild dance of laughter hand-in-hand with family, with innovation, with inspiration, with exhilaration.

This energy makes it possible. This energy makes anything possible.

Let the rest of the world run its frantic scramble, chasing the tale of time. We have transcended it, charming our past into the present to conjure a future alive with possibility.

Here, tradition and community stroll in the mist beside vision and prosperity.

Here, we whittle big business from small pleasures—hunting, singing, fishing, eating, and landing billions in the process.

Here, we're making memories and making movies, creating biofuels from foods and creating foods that fuel the body and soul.

All the while, a sacred Louisiana wisdom winks to us all. That a life well lived is the ultimate success.

Here in these Parishes of Possibility, there is an energy. Tap into it."



HOW THEY DID IT

You already know GSD&M Idea City's work. The Austin firm created "You are free to move about the country," the pitch for Southwest Airlines. Other well-known—and equally effective—slogans include "These Guys are Good" for PGA Tour golfers and "Don't mess with Texas," the top anti-litter campaign of all time.

The campaign to keep Texas clean works a bit insidiously, targeting men with pick-up trucks and others in their segment, the bracket known as the worst roadway polluters. It manipulated their pride for Texas, priming that loyalty with their cowboy bravado to reduce Texas highway litter 72%.

The ability to stamp brands was one reason the Foundation chose Idea City for the 10/12 Corridor Project. The other was Idea City's focus on purpose-based marketing, which the firm deployed to democratize air travel for Southwest Airlines.

For the 10/12 project, the firm reviewed research along the Corridor, immersed itself in the area's culture and used proprietary software to converse with many people at once. It did so over the Internet, talking with young people, successful expats and others about what makes the Corridor unique and what can be done to bring bright minds here to create jobs and wealth.

From that, the firm delivered a purpose and brand. The entire report can be read at braf.org under the link for "Releases and Reports" in the News section.



Idea City turned many people's beliefs on their head. Whereas Louisiana residents too often view the fun many people have here as a negative image for the state, Idea City found the qualities are desirable to many people in the country.

Rushing says the Corridor is a place that balances work and fun, a desirable mix to more and more people who believe their lives have been taken away by their jobs. Moving to the Corridor would give them a chance to reclaim their lives, while also making history, for they would have a chance to leave their mark in a state where improvements are on the way.

The "Energy for Life" brand will be used as both a local and national campaign to tell the 10/12 Corridor story, and the purpose project is the underpinning for long-term cooperation among leaders of the Corridor.

The Foundation is working with partners across the region to secure funding for promoting the brand. At the same time, the project is working with leaders on an economic strategy for the Corridor, a means to blend assets in new ways to create jobs and new businesses.

"The people of the Corridor will tap the energy across South Louisiana to create the next great place to live for all of us," said Foundation Executive Vice President John Spain, who is heading the project. •

manifests in three very distinct ways:

Cultural energy born from diversity, ingenuity, community, camaraderie and family values that creates vitality for life hard to find elsewhere;

Entrepreneurial energy that's found among business and community leaders who have committed their talents to make a difference, make their mark and be a part of making history;

Economic energy emanating from the traditional and alternative energy sector; from an entertainment industry that includes film, tourism and recreation; and from the industry of "eating" that includes restaurants, aquaculture, culinary exports and Pennington Biomedical Research Center's focus on nutrition.

"Ma honey, Ma boo... it's the culture...we're just raised that way."

—Lafayette business leader

Manship Theatre



Just Announced!

Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars January 31

Spreading a message of peace and love through a spirited fusion of traditional West African music, roots reggae and rhythmic traditional folk, the band crafts music that transforms and uplifts.

The Glass Mendacity April 4 - 6

Jamie Wax and Manship Theatre present a hilarious, award-winning send up of Tennessee Williams, featuring some of New Orleans finest performers, including John "Spud" McConnell.

Henry Butler: Baton Rouge Blues Week April 25

In association with Pal Productions
The New Orleans piano legend brings his r & b tinged blues to Baton Rouge in a solo engagement.

The Avett Brothers April 29

Known for raw energy, this North Carolina trio was named Group of the Year by Americana Honors & Awards. Their sound is indie-roots, guerilla old-time, folk punk and "thrashgrass."

Girls Night: The Musical May 8-25

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Henry Butler

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Rare Oxygen

FROM LOUISIANA BEGINNINGS, VERNON TAKES FLIGHT

>> by **NADENE STEINHOFF**

Olympia Vernon didn't always have a title, a Pulitzer nomination, a novel on *The New York Times* Editor's Choice list or as many awards as her years. Her beginnings were much more humble. Born on the edge of Louisiana, in Bogalusa, the fourth child of seven, she wrote her first words in the dirt. She would stretch out on her belly by a garden "held together by stones from the river."

Her step-grandfather would come out and pluck watermelons with his thumb and ring finger to test the heart. If the heart was good, all the children would come running. And after a few bites of sweet red fruit, Vernon would return to her words. "I wrote them in my head and on my fingertips and, sometimes, a breeze would blow through the curtains and I'd write every word I had held in my mind as quickly as I could."

"I'd like to think that gifted writers swim in their mothers' bellies with an oxygen of a different kind," says Vernon. "I have very few memories where a pen does not exist."

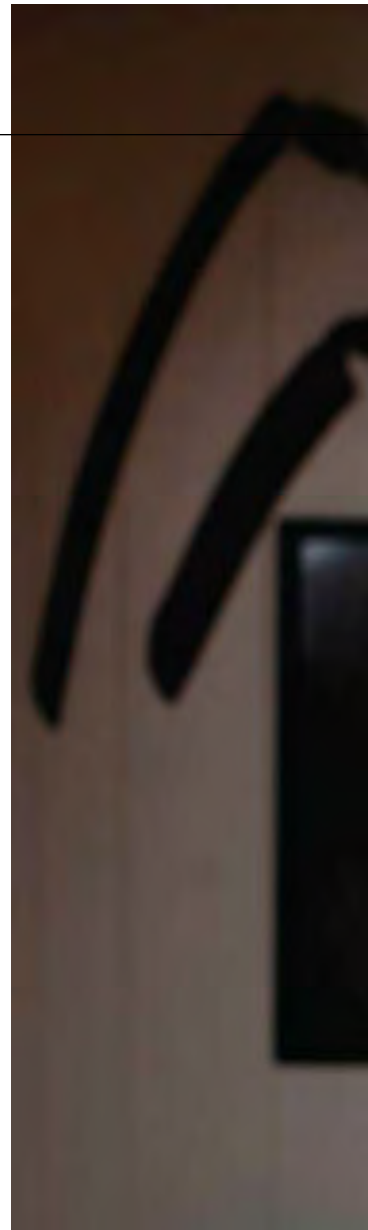
Vernon got off to a charmed start, one born of hard work and a burning gift—words so "powerful and raw," according to reviewers, it's as if she is "reinventing the language."

Not realizing one could write for a degree or for a living, Vernon got a bachelor's in criminal justice from Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, but was steered toward a master of fine arts at Louisiana State University. On a used computer that alternated between functioning and crashing, she tapped out the opening line of a story:

"One Sunday morning, during Bible study, I took a tube of fire-engine red lipstick and drew a naked lady on the first page of Genesis."

The raw coming-of-age tale that emerged was set in the rural black Southern countryside, and its characters were limited by poverty and prejudice.

When she submitted the story as credit for an independent study course, an LSU professor sent it to a New Orleans writing festival. Within a week, New York City agents were on the phone vying for rights to a novel that would be nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and land on *The New York Times* New & Noteworthy list. >>





TIM MUELLER

Olympia Vernon, the winner of the first Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, was born in Bogalusa and raised in nearby Mt. Hermon and in Osyka, Miss. She earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Southeastern Louisiana University and a master's degree in creative writing from Louisiana State University in 2002. Her three books are *Eden*, *Logic* and *A Killing in This Town*, which was chosen for the Gaines award. She holds the Hallie Ford Chair in Writing at Willamette University in Salem, Ore.

Reviewers across the country praised Vernon's writing as explosive and lyrical, fearless and erotic.

Three novels, a string of short stories and numerous awards later—including an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award—Vernon follows an obsessive rhythm. "When my characters want to write, they wake me up in the middle of the night and they keep talking until they are finished," she says. "I like to have a constant thread that connects."

She creates her first draft in nearly one sitting. "I dive into this grand ocean and I don't like to come up for air until I absolutely have to," she says.

"I never intended on 'being' a writer," she says. "I was simply writing. It was a part of what I always was."

She remembers chatting with authors at the writing festival that kicked off her career. "There was an energy around us. Something was happening to me that I had not been aware of."

It's proof, Vernon says, that gifts are part of who we are. They're something we can't live without, but often overlook. "I'm grateful. Thank God there were angels along the way to push me forward."

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"One of the Princely Men of Our Age"

>> by MARCIA GAUDET, with C.E. RICHARD

Twenty years ago, I began an ongoing conversation with Ernest J. Gaines. Reading his work is always enriching, of course, but talking with this writer is a special pleasure. *Porch Talk with Ernest Gaines*, the book of interviews Carl Wooton and I did with Ernest Gaines, was published in 1990. Jonathan Yardley, literary critic for *The Washington Post*, published a review of the book that he titled, "Ernest Gaines, Gracefully." Yardley

noted that Gaines has "won an honored place in his home state's cultural life." This stellar place of honor here in Louisiana is nowhere more apparent than in the establishment of the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

Esteem for Ernest Gaines' work reaches far beyond the borders of his home state. His stature as a writer is evident from the interest of scholars and readers around the world. His novels and stories have been translated into 17 languages. Some of the scholars who have visited Dupré Library at the University of Louisiana Lafayette in the last year to work with the Gaines papers housed there include Professor Hitoshi Namekata of Metropolitan College in Tokyo, Professor Rudolph Byrd of Emory University in Atlanta and doctoral student Siham Fouad of Tanta University in Egypt. They all praise Gaines as a writer whose fiction has powerfully affected them. Professor Namekata said, "I think that Mr. Gaines is one of the greatest authors of our time. I always wanted to go to Louisiana to see the world of the works of Mr. Gaines. At last, my dream came true."

How does a writer create such resonance, evoke such emotion halfway around the world when

ERNEST J. GAINES

praised Gaines as a gifted writer and conversationalist, "at once a son of Louisiana's strong black culture and a citizen of the world of literature." He also



his sole fictional setting is a plantation in rural Louisiana?

While Gaines' fiction is closely tied to place, it is not easy to categorize. His themes and characters do not always fit comfortably into the expectations of African American literature, Southern literature or even American literature. Instead, Gaines' fiction deals with the ambiguities of being human. His characters, formed and informed by culture and community, achieve personal dignity only when they act as individuals and take responsibility for their own actions. Gaines' genuine storytelling voice and his ability to see things as they are—with all their complexity, beauty, injustice or absurdity—enrich his fiction with compelling narrators who take us into their world. His mastery of the first person narrative and graceful control of his characters' point-of-view are recognized as significant contributions to American literature. Likewise, he has played an inestimable part in shaping an African American literary

tradition based on memory of the past. His use of humor as an essential element of human character has given the figures in his stories a certain familiarity and appeal to readers from very diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Though Gaines' fiction has long been critically acclaimed and taught in universities and schools for more than 30 years, he received national attention and an audience of millions when his novel *A Lesson Before Dying* was chosen as the Oprah Winfrey Book Club Selection in October 1997. A movie based on *A Lesson Before Dying* was televised on HBO in May 1999, and later won two Emmy Awards, including the award for Best Movie. Gaines' published works include six novels, a children's book, a collection of short stories and a collection of stories and essays: *Catherine Carmier* (1964), *Of Love and Dust* (1967), *Bloodline* (1968), *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), *A Long Day in November* (1971), *In My Father's House* (1978), *A Gathering of Old*

“With each visit I am struck by the gentle voice of this large man who has shaped such beautiful portraits of the black and white characters in his fiction. Both as a writer and as a teacher, he has immeasurably enriched our lives.”

—WILLIAM FERRIS, FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Men (1983), *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), *Mozart and Leadbelly* (2005). Four of his works have been made into critically acclaimed films, and a television documentary (*Ernest J. Gaines: Louisiana Stories*) was produced by Louisiana Public Broadcasting in 1992. Gaines' novels are regularly chosen as part of the Library of Congress' Center for the Book One Book Community Reading Programs, and the National Endowment for the Arts has named *A Lesson Before Dying* as part of its 2008 Big Read National Reading Program. For students, that book offers an especially identifiable benchmark of the author's place in the American canon of letters: In 1999, the book was published by Cliff's Notes Study Guides, attesting to the fact that Gaines' novel is assigned to thousands of college and high school students throughout the United States, alongside the other great masterpieces of literature in the catalogue of Cliff's Notes.

Ernest J. Gaines' work has been the subject of extensive serious scholarship. It has been the focus of 15 doctoral dissertations at major universities such as Syracuse, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and University of Texas. There have been over 200 scholarly articles and 12 books published on Gaines, including the collection of essays *Plus sur Gaines*, edited by French scholar Françoise Clary and published in Paris by Atlande in 2006. The University of Louisiana Lafayette, where Gaines is Writer-in-Residence Emeritus, is in the process of establishing the Ernest J. Gaines Center, an international base for Gaines scholarship as well as an archive for the author's papers.

William Ferris, former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has said that he was introduced to Gaines' work by Alice Walker, with whom Ferris was teaching at the time at Jackson State University. He says, "Alice spoke enthusiastically about both Gaines' literary talents and his generosity in helping younger writers like herself." Ferris visited with Gaines and has heard him read several times since their initial interview, including a featured reading by Gaines at a symposium at the Sorbonne in Paris. Ferris comments: "With each visit I am struck by the gentle voice of this large man who has shaped such beautiful portraits of the black and white characters in his fiction. Both as a writer and as a teacher, he has immeasurably enriched our lives."

It is a sentiment shared by the many of us who have enjoyed not only the pleasures of studying Gaines' work but also the privilege of his company and conversation. The late Professor Milton Rickels, a renowned scholar of American literature, was a colleague and friend of Gaines at UL Lafayette. Professor Rickels is both poetic and accurate in this description of Ernest J. Gaines: "A man whom I admire, respect, and love as one of the princely men of our age, a creator of the contemporary sensibility." •



Meet me at the market!

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Main Street Market—8am - Noon
Stay for the Parade!

**Saturday, February 2 for the
Spanish Town Parade**

Red Stick Farmers Market
Special hours —7:30 - 11:00 am

ERNEST J. GAINES AWARD FOR LITERARY EXCELLENCE



Local artist Robert Moreland created a sculpture for the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. The sculpture, an artistic representation of a hand, was formed in December. Artists and assistants poured molten bronze from the crucible into a mold, which was broken to release multiple copies of the sculpture. Moreland then cleaned and polished the sculptures.

>> photos by **JASON PEEK**



A Different Place

LSU PROJECT PEERS AT CHERISHED PERKINS ROAD OVERPASS >> by MUKUL VERMA

The roar of I-10 is turned up to 11 inside the former warehouse of Perkins Road Hardware. Above the din, LSU art historian Darius Spieth describes the highway as a “monster.” He’s lecturing to LSU architecture students and area property owners about the area’s transformation from wilderness to a jangle of shops, industrial concerns, restaurants and houses.

His compilation, distilled from public documents, some of them obscure, is a segment in a project led by David Baird, an LSU architecture professor who lives in a modern house around the corner from the overpass. Baird charged his second year graduate students to research the area and to offer designs for buildings and structures that blend into the district.

“We are trying to extract the qualities that are special and unique, that have been developed over decades by merchants just doing their thing,” says Baird. Not preserving the unique would result in the district losing its position in the market, says Baird.

Consider, for instance, if the city-parish imposed a new sign ordinance for the district. A thoughtless ordinance would eliminate the diverse signs, replace them with vanilla ones.

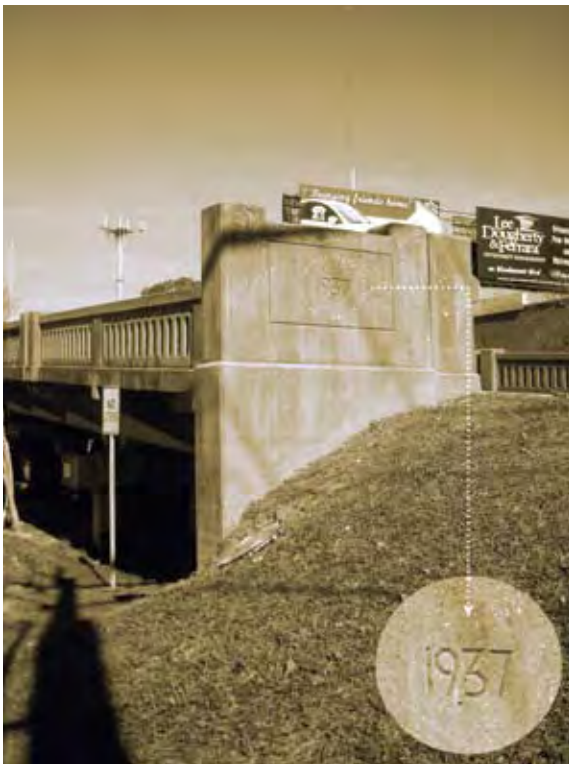
“The first step for us isn’t really anticipating what the future will be, but laying out a solid foundation of people’s understanding of the neighborhood,” says Baird. “If something does move forward, people would understand the uniqueness of the area.”

Now that the research is done, Baird is searching for \$10,000 to publish it. Here is a keyhole into what the group and Spieth discovered.

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LSU professor David Baird inside the former Perkins Road Hardware.





A BIT OF HISTORY

If you declared Perkins Road Overpass to be the most unique neighborhood in Baton Rouge, a lot of heads would nod. But how did the area get to be this way?

A history of the area by LSU art historian Darius Spieth provides some clues. He scoured public documents—including ownership records in the “Byzantine” filing system of the local assessor—to deliver the first known history of the overpass.

His work was a segment in research orchestrated by LSU architecture professor David Baird, whose second year graduate students also researched the area.

Here’s a glimpse of what Spieth uncovered.

Perkins Road existed in the 19th century, but was known by other names, such as Road from Baton Rouge to Amite and Middle Highland Road. In most of the 1800s, the land was wilderness and plantation.

Among the people who owned the land that now is the overpass area is the colorful Philip Hickey. Born in 1778, he operated plantations in the region, was a captain in the cavalry in the Spanish militia, served in the Louisiana Senate and built the first sugar mill in East Baton Rouge.

By 1834, the overpass area was part of the Richland Plantation, which was originally carved out of Magnolia Mound, which survives on Nicholson Drive.

In 1855, the Richland Plantation was bought by John and Henry Perkins. The road is named after them. The land was passed through estates and sales until it ended up in several hands. The city bought one of the largest pieces and now it is City Park.

In 1907, the railroad arrived, courtesy of William Edenborn, a steel wire business owner who was born in Germany. Edenborn was attempting to connect cities from Shreveport to the Gulf Coast. His

firm, the Louisiana Railway and Navigation Co., provided not only rail service but also ferry service across the Mississippi River at Baton Rouge, where there was no bridge. The railroad moved lumber, sugar, sugarcane, cotton, crude oil.

The railroad also moved people, but passenger service provided very little profit. At one point, the Southern Belle, a legendary streamliner connecting Shreveport with Baton Rouge and New Orleans, rolled on the rails. Passenger service was discontinued in 1969.

An aside about Edenborn: He named stops along the railroad after cities in Germany, hence Essen



and Siegen lanes. Edenborn fought with Huey P. Long, continuing a family squabble that began with Edenborn alienating Long's father in a business dispute.

By 1929, maps show that Perkins, Christian Street, Ferndale and other streets had already been built, but the area was largely rural. One of the earliest buildings was

Zee Zee Gardens, which has been a fruit store, a clothing boutique, an antiques shop, a gift shop, restaurants and now is a bar.

The state built the overpass in 1937 as part of Long's initiative to modernize Louisiana's infrastructure. The area's drainage system was built at the same time. The overpass improved traffic flow,



WHAT'S THERE

Baton Rouge residents know the Perkins Road Overpass is unique. Here are some of the businesses that make it so. You may not recognize all the names, for there are 64 businesses from the I-10 exit on Perkins to the railroad tracks.

Longshore Studio Gallery, Royal Standard, Overpass Cleaners, George's Restaurant, Chelsea's Club, Bet-R grocery store, Duvic's, Ivar's, Bolton Health Mart, Rama Thai restaurant, DiGiulio's, Red Onion home goods, Zippy's, Mud and Metal, Cottonwood Books, Pinetta's, Cracker Barrel, Zee Zee Gardens, Loft 3H clothing, Kean's the Cleaners, Architectural Coatings, Parrain's, Bella Bella, Mark Culotta Landscape, Beauvoir Firewood, TriState Road Borings, PLUSOne Design, Living Foods, Eiland Interiors and La Salon.

"When you look at the area, the infrastructure is underutilized," says Baird. "It's just amazing. There is a lot of growing room, partly because of inefficient use of space."



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About half of the 62 buildings in the area were built between 1932 and 1953.

providing an ever-open route over the railroad. The overpass also made the area more accessible from downtown. Before Long, the roads from the city to the countryside were made of dirt.

With the overpass in place, the area developed rapidly in the 1930s and 1940s into the mix of homes, businesses and offices. About half of the 62 buildings in the area were built between 1932 and 1953.

A turning point for the area was the interstate. Opened in fall 1964 through parts of Baton Rouge, the building of I-10 erased more than a dozen overpass structures, about half of them built before 1949.

Perkins Road Overpass was a lure for the city's bohemians and remains so for modern ones. Colonel's Club (now Chelsea's) was the center of the area's music scene in the 1960s. Hippies lived in the area for low rent and connection to the peace movement at LSU.

Music star Johnny Rivers—John Henry Ramistella—got his start in the area. In 1947, the 5-year-old Rivers had moved to Baton Rouge from New York with his unemployed father, who was getting a job from a relative. The relative was the chair of the LSU Art Department. Rivers' music blended funk with Go-Go Rock. His hits included the No. 1 *Poor Side of Town* and *Secret Agent Man*.

Leon Medica, a founder of Louisiana LeRoux, also began his local career in the overpass district. •



FROM NUTS TO SOUP

An important business in the Perkins Road Overpass district burned in December 2006. But the loss of Perkins Road Hardware will be softened by a redevelopment that keeps the property's history in mind.

Donnie Jarreau is leading the redevelopment. He has letters of intent from companies wanting to open restaurants and also will build four apartments on the site.

"I could fill it up over three times over," says Jarreau. The location—"people just love the area," Jarreau says—is the reason for strong demand for the space. Jarreau won't reveal the name of tenants until the designs are final and a deal with the state for parking spots under the interstate is done.

Remson Haley Herpin Architects' vision retains the hardware store's façade. A restaurant is planned for the corner of the site, a second one is planned at the rear. Apartments will be built next to the Living Foods store.

Construction is expected to begin in the second quarter and be completed by year-end. •



Lauren Stuart

Age: 21

LSU student who founded Environmental Conservation Organization and advocated for a pedestrian-friendly campus.

High school: Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts

Interests: Traveling, yoga, modern dance, cycling, gardening, photography.

Ride, Lauren, Ride

LSU ACTIVIST PUSHES FEET AND BIKES OVER CARS

>> by **ALI SPINDLER**/photo by **LORI WASELCHUK**

If you see Lauren Stuart and a herd of blinking cyclists riding toward you, don't panic. It's just Baton Rouge Critical Mass, a group that organizes mass rides to celebrate cycling and promote bike safety—hence the headlights to make them more visible on long winter nights. Working with them are members of the Environmental Conservation Organization, an LSU student group that addresses environmental concerns in the area.

Stuart, a senior studying economics and international studies, co-founded ECO in 2005. Launched as a reaction to problems exacerbated by Hurricane Katrina, ECO is among progressive student organizations at LSU.

"After Katrina, there was extensive coastal damage, oil spills, contaminated air and major traffic problems. The timing was right to address many environmental issues," says Stuart.

ECO started by raising money for the Sierra Club Coastal Restoration Fund. The group has since

taken on a number of projects to curb excessive traffic, address poor air quality and promote cycling as an alternative means of transportation.

"It's really a quality of life issue," says Stuart.

While industrial plants on the Mississippi River cause pollution in the area, individuals must remember they do as well. "Cars are big contributors to pollution and reducing their use is the most direct way an individual can help fix the problem."

With this in mind, Stuart and the members of ECO spearheaded efforts to promote cycling—and thereby discourage individual commuting—on campus. Stuart, an avid cyclist, started building a network of ECO members and local bicyclists with Bike Fest in 2006.

Around that time, ECO also unveiled its first fleet of Gold Bikes, public bicycles available to anyone for use around the university, free of charge. Modeled after the Yellow Bike program in Austin, Texas, the Gold Bikes were designed to provide

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easy bicycle access for students. ECO purchased 10 bikes impounded by the LSU Office of Parking, Traffic and Transportation for about \$1 each.

With the help of friends at a local bike shop, the club painted, repaired and posted the bikes at designated spots on campus. Stuart recalled the ca-

work has solidified as a community, which is very rewarding.”

ECO was also influential in the planning of Easy Streets, the initiative to close LSU streets to outside vehicles during school hours. The project aims to make the university a completely pedestrian

Stuart was named one of *Jane* magazine’s “30 most influential women under 30” this year for her efforts with ECO to encourage alternative transportation at LSU.

maraderie and skills that ECO members gained while working on the bikes. One freshman actually learned to use a screwdriver for the first time as he struggled to repair an old bike.

The original bikes did come with their share of snags. ECO initially made people register to use the Gold Bikes, and the process was a little complicated. The project also demanded a lot of upkeep; volunteers had to check and repair the bikes every week.

Improving on past policies, ECO introduced its new set of Gold Bikes during LSU’s Bike Week in October. Last year, the Office of Parking gave all its impounded bikes to ECO. The club then sold one-third of the donated bicycles and raised enough money to repair its second set of bikes.

The new Gold Bikes will not be locked up and will not need to be checked out. They will be left at random locations on campus for students to use freely.

Stuart has high hopes for the Gold Bikes and the future of cycling at LSU. “Cycling as a mode of transportation is a lifestyle,” she says. “Our net-

campus. Members of ECO and student government met with administrative officials each month to address concerns about Easy Streets and devise an awareness campaign.

Easy Streets went into effect in July. Only registered visitors, faculty, staff and delivery vehicles can enter campus during working hours. Easy Streets’ goals are to ensure pedestrian and cyclist safety, improve timing of bus schedules and encourage the use of alternative transportation, such as carpools, buses or bicycles.

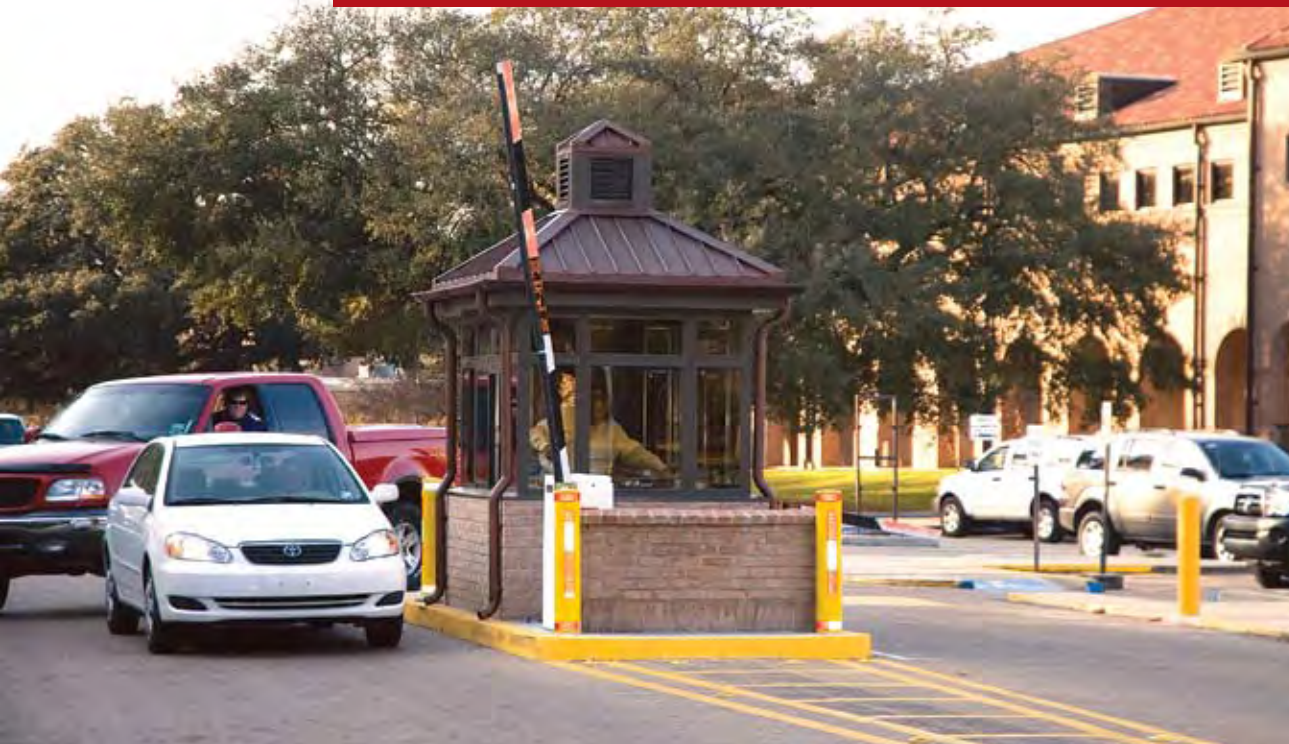
“I don’t think Easy Streets will solve traffic problems by itself,” Stuart says. “It requires multiple complementary policies to succeed.” While she has definitely noticed more people riding bikes to campus since the introduction of Easy Streets, Stuart believes there are still more changes to be made.

“It’s extremely important to foster an active dialogue among pedestrians, cyclists and motorists,” she says. For example, she explains that many people don’t realize bicycles belong on the roads, not on the sidewalks. Simple education about traffic

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ANOTHER VIEW: LSU's Easy Streets project, which closed the campus to many motorists during most of the day, broke the street grid, causing traffic jams on Highland Road and Nicholson Drive. That's the complaint of a top traffic engineer in Baton Rouge, who chose to comment on background only. He says the street closure was planned as if the university were an island, not part of a street network.

LSU's Gary Graham, who oversees parking and traffic, disagrees: "There was a 12 month plus study done with Walker Parking Consultants, a national firm that worked with the city as well as LSU to devise the program. According to city traffic engineers, there has not been any major negative impact on the traffic with the plan. They are in the process of retiming the traffic signals on the major streets to take advantage of the reduced cut through traffic so I'm not sure what your expert is basing their observations on."



regulations and improved street markings should ease tensions and increase understanding.

The road has been a little bumpy. Students and community members initially were less than satisfied with the road closures. Stuart herself has been verbally attacked for her work with ECO and Easy Streets.

Yet she has confidence in LSU's vision for a pedestrian campus and continued efforts for environmental improvement. ECO is pushing for Chancellor Sean O'Keefe to sign the American

College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, an agreement among more than 400 major universities to become sustainable and diminish carbon output.

Stuart remains optimistic that Baton Rouge will follow suit. "Citywide, I really look forward to BREC's Capital Area Pathways Project to build bike lanes throughout the area," says Stuart. "In my mind, that would be the single greatest thing to happen to Baton Rouge." •



SPECIAL REPORT

Lesson Time

FOUNDATION'S MEETINGS WITH TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS
PRODUCE TWO BIG IDEAS >> by **NATHAN SELF**, with **REBECCA RUBINS**

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Teachers and principals across the state agree that overage students, lack of parent involvement, teacher quality and unmotivated students are key issues preventing their students from achieving. Solving even one of these issues, they say, could spark improvements across the entire system of public education in Louisiana.

These findings—outcomes from a series of meetings and surveys conducted by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation from September to November 2007—have produced two ideas that could yield promising results for Louisiana's children.

If education organizations and community leaders focus their efforts in a few key areas—rather than stretching their resources across the entire issue—it's believed that the level of achievement in our schools will improve.

The Foundation talked with teachers and principals because they are engaged on the ground in schools. Yet the teachers and principals say they have too often been left out of policy and reform discussions.

In discussions with the Foundation, principals cited teacher quality, overage students and low par-

According to the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, an alarming 43% of new teachers in Louisiana leave the profession within 3 years.

ent involvement as the top three factors damaging student achievement. Teachers also zeroed in on teacher quality and parent involvement, and cited unmotivated students as the third factor causing poor results.

From the meetings and surveys, two ideas emerged to address two issues cited by teachers and principals: overage and disruptive students, and teacher quality.

Addressing the overage student population, the first idea suggests creating separate schools designed to help these children reach their potential. This will benefit both the struggling students and the schools they leave behind.

The second idea, creating feedback circles, confronts an important side-issue that surfaced throughout the meetings and surveys. Teachers and principals routinely say they are left out of curriculum and other policy decisions, which they are expected to endorse and implement.

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

One idea that surfaced at the meetings is to create a system of academies designed to provide an excellent education for students who are two years or more behind in their current school or who have disruptive discipline problems. Overage academies could benefit both of these populations by providing individual, high-quality attention in a non-traditional classroom setting.

Both overage and disruptive students strain the traditional classroom setting. To succeed, many of them need more individual attention, a catered curriculum and additional services like counseling or life-skills training. By creating schools that specifically confront these issues, the students will again have the opportunity to excel. Furthermore, such schools will ease the pressure on teachers in traditional schools—resulting in improved working conditions, a key factor in teacher retention.

To date, Louisiana has taken two approaches to

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...one thing is certain: schools for overage children must be of the highest quality. The teachers and administrators must be the very best available and must have access to the funding and other resources they need to ensure that every child has access to an education system that works.

target overage and disruptive students. The first, known as the Options Program, is administered by the state Department of Education and offers pre-GED classes, vo-tech training and counseling for students 16 and older who are academically behind. Students attend GED classes for three hours a day, and then work in one of several skills areas—such as welding, culinary arts, childcare, graphic arts, fast food service and retail. Students must stay in the program for two years, and often leave without a GED or skills certificate.

Unfortunately, the Options Program is an unfunded mandate, and the Department of Education does not monitor each district to ensure that the program is available and following state guidelines. In East Baton Rouge, options programs can accommodate 200—only 18% of the area's 1,100 overage students. Over the past two years, the same programs have served around 150 students—only four of these students earned a GED and only 20 have received a skills certificate.

The state's second approach is alternative schools focusing on disruptive students. There are 102 of these schools in the state, serving students who have been suspended or expelled from traditional schools. These alternative schools, however, are temporary holding grounds where the average length of stay is less than two months.

In contrast, the suggested overage academies would provide troubled students a new chance at learning and could take a variety of forms. However, the schools should be full-time, regular schools, accepting students at the beginning of each year and enrolling them for the entire year. They should target students in grades 6 through 12, since this is where the overage population is concentrated.

A potential school model could experiment with a rolling system that allows students to progress based on achievement rather than time elapsed. This would give students more motivation to succeed and the opportunity to catch-up, possibly returning to the traditional school system the following year.

A full investigation of best practices and curriculum variations is necessary in developing this model further, but one thing is certain: they must be of the highest quality. The teachers and administrators must be the very best available and must have access to funding and other resources they need to ensure that every child has access to an education system that works.

To launch this initiative, it is suggested that a pilot school be designed and opened for fall 2009. The Foundation is currently looking for partners to help develop this idea further and implement the strategy.

FEEDBACK IS GOOD

A common thread in the discussions with principals and teachers pointed to communications issues between those who make decisions—local school boards and state officials—and those who implement them—teachers and principals. In order to address this problem, a system of “feedback circles” is suggested, allowing each of the involved parties the opportunity to discuss the problems facing their schools and districts, and to weigh in on prospective policy changes.

Often, teachers insist, policymakers do not understand the impact their requirements have on the day-to-day effectiveness in classrooms. Principals agree, citing loads of paperwork that prevent them from assisting teachers with classroom duties and continued professional development.

Feedback circles will provide a forum for resolving these issues, and there are already existing networks that could implement the suggestion. Local education funds, if willing, are well-positioned to organize and host these meetings. The feedback circles should be scheduled at regular intervals, perhaps monthly, and might work best if they target a specific issue at each meeting. Possible topics could include teacher recruiting, administrative paperwork, accountability, special education and minimum staffing requirements—all of which were cited by principals and teachers in their meetings and surveys.

It is surprising that local districts do not currently have a comparable system in place, as this could greatly reduce the friction between policymakers and practitioners. •

For more information or to read the full report, visit BRAf.org and click on News and then Reports and Releases or contact Rebecca Rubins at (225) 387-6126 or RRubins@braf.org.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation held meetings with teachers and principals from across the state to identify priority issues that could be tackled to quickly make improvements to public education. If education organizations and community leaders focus their efforts in a few key areas—rather than stretching their resources across the entire issue, it is believed the level of achievement in our schools will improve.

In all, 35 principals and 110 teachers from 50 schools—located in East and West Baton Rouge, Calcasieu, Lincoln, Rapides and St. Mary parishes—participated in the meetings and surveys. At the meetings, teachers and principals were asked to focus on the top factors impeding student achievement.

Principals cited teacher quality, overage students and parent involvement as the top three factors impeding student achievement. Teachers zeroed in on teacher quality, parent involvement and student motivation.

Teacher Quality: On the issue of teacher quality, both principals and teachers agreed that increased salaries might aid recruiting and retention efforts, but also noted that work conditions have the single biggest effect on teaching performance and retention—especially for new teachers. According to the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, an alarming 43% of new teachers in Louisiana leave the profession within three years. This revolving door is a strain on district administrators and means that many new teachers never reach their full potential in the classroom.

Throughout the meetings, participants noted that both new and veteran teachers often have

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trouble with classroom management. Inadequate training, large class sizes, disruptive students and burdensome paperwork requirements were frequently linked to this deficiency. In terms of work conditions, problems with classroom management can make the profession seem intolerable. The majority of exiting teachers cite classroom behavior and student disciplinary problems as the top factors in their departure.

fied, often does not promote achievement. While some participants suggested that offering rewards for achievement can produce short-term improvements, others cautioned that instilling an intrinsic desire to learn is necessary to encourage a lifetime of learning and truly prepare students for success after school.

Overage Students: Principals, especially, cited overage students as an obstacle impeding per-

If education organizations and community leaders focus their efforts in a few key areas—rather than stretching their resources across the entire issue, it is believed the level of achievement in our schools will improve.

Parent Involvement: Principals and teachers, alike, pointed to parent involvement as a key factor in student performance. As one might expect, they commented that parents of the best students are usually highly involved in their children's education, while those of troubled students are often difficult or impossible to reach. Some suggested that schools ought to be refashioned into "community center" type facilities in order to encourage more active participation in public education. By offering parents educational and social services opportunities at school sites, many felt that students would receive greater community support and increase their chances of success.

Student Motivation: Many students lack long-term life goals and are simply not motivated to learn, say principals and teachers. School, for many students, is seen as more of a holding pen than a gateway—our school culture, the meetings veri-

formance and improvement in our public schools. Many linked this to other issues, especially student motivation. They commented that overage students often set the example for younger students, who sometimes develop lower expectations and behavior problems as a result. In this way, a successful culture of learning can quickly erode into a system where students neither expect achievement nor work toward it.

Teachers agreed, commenting that one unmotivated student can sink an entire class. With more than 64,000 students, or 10% of the state student population, two years or more behind, clearly overage students are a driving factor in the public education system. In East Baton Rouge Parish, about 7,500, or 14% of all students—and more than 20% of middle school students—are at least one year behind. •

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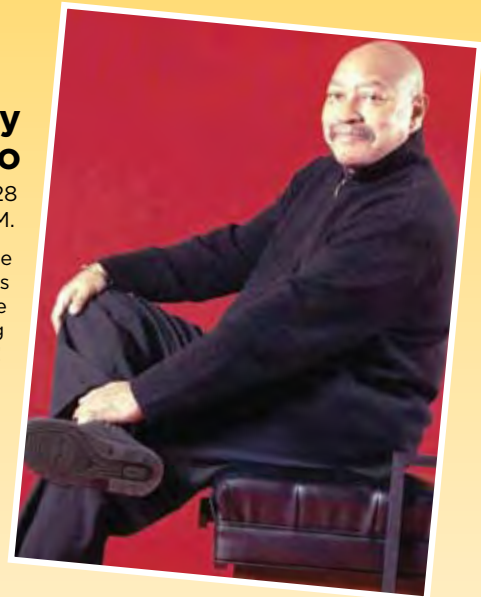
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Baton Rouge Area Foundation



The River City Jazz Masters Series is presented by the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge in collaboration with the River City Jazz Coalition.

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Kink in your think

The geeks among us can't resist Templeton.org, a website that asks really smart people some very difficult questions. Among them: Are there multiple universes? Will money solve Africa's development problem? Does the universe have a purpose?

The questions fit the mission of the John Templeton Foundation, which uses donations from philanthropists for discovery in areas engaging life's biggest questions.



Here's a website conversation with Paul Davies, theoretical physicist, about the possibility of multiple universes.

The concept of a multiverse is a very ancient one. Why is it coming to the public's attention again?

Davies: Advances in fundamental physics and cosmology lead to a definite prediction that the universe should have a domain structure in which the laws of physics vary from one domain to another. The currently fashionable attempt to unify all of physics, called string theory, suggests that there are an almost limitless number of alternative possible low-energy worlds called "the landscape." When this is combined with the favored model for the origin of the universe—eternal inflation—then a mechanism exists for populating the landscape with really-existing universes, each universe being a "bubble" of expanding space with its own distinctive set of laws dictated by where on the landscape of possibilities it emerges. •

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Safe streets

New York is creating some harmony between bicyclists and motorists, experimenting with lanes to reduce accidents and deaths caused by cars banging into cyclists. The city's Department of Transportation has built a 10-foot wide bike lane between sidewalks and a lane of parked cars. Plastic posts restrict cars from entering the bike lanes.

For pedestrians, the city has extended islands to reduce the space required to cross from 75 feet to 45 feet.

The first such lane in New York City runs more than seven blocks in the Chelsea neighborhood.

New York City gets credit for experimenting with the lanes in the U.S., but not for innovation. They are already popular in Europe. Learn more about the project at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/9thavecomp.pdf>. •

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Number of cities with more than 10 million people, up from 1950, when only New York City and Tokyo were in the category. Next year marks the first time more than half the people on the planet—3.2 billion—will live in cities.

Source: State of the World 2007: Our Urban Future

The Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence honors the legacy of one of America's finest literary treasures and recognizes the work of a deserving fiction writer. The winner will receive a \$10,000 award and present a reading from the work at the award ceremony in January 2009. Travel, accommodations and meals will be provided.

Criteria for submission: Any book-length work of fiction published during 2007; the writer must be an African-American. Submissions will be accepted from February 1, 2008 through April 30, 2008.

To enter a book for consideration, send a completed registration form and 8 copies of the book to:

The Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence
c/o The Baton Rouge Area Foundation
402 N. Fourth Street, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802

Complete submission criteria and registration forms are available at www.ErnestJGainesAward.org.



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*The judges reserve the right not to issue an award if they feel
the selection pool lacks an acceptable candidate.*



*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*

Green is green

Around these parts, homebuilders and the city-parish toss angry words at each other about fees to mitigate the impact of housing construction. In Portland, a city visited this year by local leaders to gin up new ideas, city officials and homebuilders are battling over carbon taxes and incentives.

Wanting to curb greenhouse gas emissions, Portland city officials have proposed fees on homes that are not extremely energy efficient, while offering to pay cash to developers who build houses that are 45% more efficient than already stringent green standards.

Homebuilders are grumpy about the idea. Officials, they assert, are offering the proposal in an escalating battle with Chicago, Seattle, Austin and San Francisco to be the greenest city of all, reports the *Oregonian*.

The battle in Portland illustrates again how local and state governments are moving rapidly to combat global warming.



For instance, late last year, Maricopa County in Arizona announced it would replace 2,000 vehicles in coming years with hybrids and other fuel-efficient vehicles. San Jose is considering green standards for commercial buildings that equal requirements for city buildings of more than 10,000 square feet.

But Portland's carbon tax is the farthest-reaching proposition among rules for protecting the environment. Watch Oregon this spring for the next battle to be green. •



Recommended reading

It was believed that the brain was rigid. Once neurons established a pattern, they worked together to function in one way and no other. But brain scientists seem to be disproving the idea, giving hope that injured brains can be rewired to recover abilities, and even trained to turn back diminished mental abilities that stutter the mind with age.

Neuroplasticity posits that the brain is adaptable and that new neurons fire up throughout life.

One study shows that blind children in India retrained their brains to partly regain eyesight.

An American who had a persistent mental itch in an amputated limb was able to retrain his brain to stop the itching. How? Scientists had him scratch a mirror image of his existing limb.

And there is evidence that aging brains can reverse memory loss by retraining the mind for a few hours each day.

Want to know more? A starting point is *The Brain that Changes Itself* by Norman Doidge and *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain* by Sharon Begley of the *Wall Street Journal*. •



Hush, hush

Companies working on potentially breakthrough energy technologies are laying low, providing scant information about their work. One of those firms is Eestor, which is developing an ultracapacitor—a device that can be rapidly charged with electricity at very little cost. Eestor’s technology could replace the combustion engine over time, eliminating the need for gasoline.

The company gained credibility because of an investment by Kleiner Perkins Caulfield & Byers, the venture capital firm that has invested early in big Internet hits, including Amazon.com and Google.

Eestor doesn’t have a website and the company talks little to the media. A product is expected from the firm this year.

Meanwhile, another energy startup with a big idea got publicity when Google announced investments in alternative energy in December. Makani Power, led by an MIT grad, is working on wind energy, but not on the ground.

“Capturing a small fraction of the global high-altitude wind energy flux could be sufficient to supply the current energy needs of the globe,” says the company’s website. “Makani is developing high-altitude wind en-

“Capturing a small fraction of the global high-altitude wind energy flux could be sufficient to supply the current energy needs of the globe.”

ergy extraction technologies aimed at the most powerful wind resources.”

Though the website does not offer technology details, it does have entertaining bios of the staff, which is led by chief scientist Saul Griffith, an MIT Ph.D. who is in the National Inventors Hall of Fame and co-authors children’s comic books. Accomplishments of other staff members include California citrus squeezer champion, one of the world’s foremost kite designers and an international baton twirling champion. •

GRANTED

Christine Neglulescu teaches ballet student Colleen Jackson at Episcopal School. The two will be traveling to Austria with Renee Chatelain and her Mid City Dance Project.

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United, we dance

MID CITY, EPISCOPAL DANCERS PERFORMING IN AUSTRIA

>> by **ALI SPINDLER**/photos by **LORI WASELCHUK**

Tia Wade is selling candy and baking sweets to pay for a trip to Austria. Across town, Emily Lutz worked during the holidays and is raising money in other ways to travel with Wade.

Their link is dance teacher and former attorney Renee Chatelain, a founder of Mid City Dance who teaches dance at Episcopal School. This summer, Chatelain will travel with Tia and 12 other Mid City dancers and Emily and 10 Episcopal dance students to Austria, where they will perform together at Innsbrucker Tanzsommer, a dance festival.

"I really, really, really love dancing," beams Tia, a 12-year-old who attends Glasgow Middle School, "and I'm excited to be with my friends."

Adds Emily, "I'm excited about performing, watching other performances and really getting to see a different culture."

Each dancer is raising \$1,000 to help cover ex-

penses. Chatelain is raising money to pay remaining expenses.

Tia doesn't have her \$1,000 yet, but she has been selling candy, baking sweets and selling \$1 blessings at Greater St. James Baptist Church to get there. Dancers from Episcopal have also been

working diligently to raise their money. Emily, a senior, wrapped gifts with her classmates at Barnes and Noble during the holiday season.

Created in 2004, Tanzsommer has become the most popular dance festival in Austria. Young! Tanzsommer, an offshoot for youth dancers, features just five American compa-

nies each year. The troupe comprised of Mid City and Episcopal is among the chosen five. The Baton Rouge dancers will perform seven times in three cities from June 25 to July 6. They will visit Venice on a side trip.

The group got a quick nod to perform in the fes-

Since 2002, donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation have given \$72,000 to the Mid City Dance Project, which teaches dance to underserved kids.

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Chrystin Johnson practices for *The Nutcracker*. She is a student in the Mid-City Dance Project and will be traveling to Europe this summer.



Renee Chatelain, director of the Mid City Dance Project, works with Jade Flint during rehearsal for *The Nutcracker*. Flint will also be traveling to Europe with the dance project this summer.

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tival when auditioning before a festival director who flew in to watch them in Baton Rouge. After observing only a few routines in September, she offered them a spot in Young! Tanzsommer.

Chatelain believes that the spirit of her dancers convinced the judge. “There is such vivacity about them,” she says. “They love to dance so much and I think that really came across and won her over.”

Chatelain co-founded the Mid City Dance Project 13 years ago. She was attending law school and wanted to continue her love for dance by teaching in the inner city. “Mid City started out with underserved and special-needs kids and it has grown to bridge gaps between many communities,” she says.

What began with a handful of children dancing

at the Dr. Martin Luther King Community Center is now a sizeable dance troupe with participants from across the metro area. Mid City’s 400 dancers range from elementary school children to students from Southern University and LSU.

“Mid City has shown me how little it can take to impact another life and we always try to teach the kids that,” says Chatelain. “They have to learn that they can touch the lives of others not only with their talent, but also by positively impacting the community.”

She meets with the group up to seven evenings a week, depending on their schedule. Mid City’s major performances include “*Giraffes Can’t Dance*,” “*Inner City Nutcracker*” and “*The Fading Line: Commemoration of the 1953 Bus Boycott*.”



Chatelain works with dancers Tya Wicker and Jessica Carter.

The dance company has been featured in the Wall of America, a giant mural that highlights interpretations of the American work ethic from all 50 states. The dancers' energy and spirit attracted artist Ellen Griesedieck, and she chose to incorporate the Mid City Dance Project as the Louisiana installation of the painting. The project is chaired by Paul Newman.

In 2001, Chatelain took a one-year break from her law career to establish the dance program at Episcopal. She didn't return to law and continues to teach at Episcopal.

Because she crosses divides, Chatelain brought together dancers of Mid City and Episcopal. It made sense to choreograph the Austria performances around bridges. The two troupes will

dance together in one routine, showing how they collaborate with dance as a common ground.

The path for Chatelain has not been easy, but it has been worth the effort. She relates the experience to the Biblical miracle of the loaves and fish: no matter how many children want to dance or how few resources they have, Mid City Dance includes everyone and always manages to succeed.

"There may be momentary exhaustion, but the ripple effect is very powerful. The bottom line is that you may have all kinds of administrative problems, you have to write grants and you constantly fight to make things work. But when a child in a walker shows up wanting to dance, and you give her that opportunity—that's what keeps me motivated." •

Art School

BY PRESERVING ITS PAST, LAKE CHARLES SPARKS ITS FUTURE

>> by **MUKUL VERMA**/photos by **LORI WASELCHUK**

Candice Alexander is surrounded by the things that come out of her head. Paintings and prints are hung here and there, crowding her into the center of the room, where another canvas awaits her brush.

This is what you expect from an artist's space. But what you don't expect is its location.

For more than seven decades, her studio was a classroom inside Central School, which was shuttered when it outlasted its original use. Destined for demolition, the building was salvaged by residents of Lake Charles, who decided it would be fit for artists like Alexander.

"It's prime real estate," says Alexander, whose work is displayed across the state, including in Baton Rouge at the Arts Council building and at the Arts Market in downtown. "My studio was in the back of a trailer when I was going to school at McNeese. After school, one of the judges in town introduced me to the space and I've used it for five years."

She travels around the country, searching for inspiration and creating her art, knowing that she can return to her nominally-priced studio to continue her business.

Now known as the Central School Arts and

Humanities Center, many other artists use the available space, including an older group that relies on each other's knowledge to improve their abilities. An artist accomplished in color exchanges tips with one who has an exceptional ability to draw perspectives.

But for more than 70 years, this space near downtown buzzed with the voices of children. When the school opened in 1912, it was for all ages. As Lake Charles grew, Central changed with it, eventually becoming an elementary school. Then the school system used it for offices, eventually moving out and padlocking the building in the early 1980s.

Uncared for, the building began to rot, just blocks from the center of downtown. So the school board decided to tear it down, only to find that residents of Lake Charles loved the old place—and did so fiercely.

"Mayor Willie Mount was approached by some ladies who believed it was intolerable that such an important part of the community would fall into pieces," says Irene Vandever, executive director of the Arts and Humanities Council.

Mount, now a state senator, challenged Lake Charles residents at the time. If they wanted to keep the building, they had to be willing to pay for



Candice Alexander is assured of an inexpensive space to paint, thanks to the people of Lake Charles.

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The old Central School has been transformed into a public arts center in Lake Charles. Members of the Dolby Elementary Art Club (*above, center*) work on plates for a printing project that is being taught by Candice Alexander. Benita Corley encourages Ruth Shelton as she works on a watercolor painting. They are members of the Studio 347 art collective.

its renovation. They were, passing a tax to cover a \$1.3 million bond issue for the conversion of Central School into an arts center.

The city's renovations preserved the heart of pine floors with cypress trim. The original slate chalkboard and brass railings remain, as do the 13-foot ceilings.

The building is 54,000 square feet spread over three floors. Classrooms are spaces for artists, arts organizations and performances. The Lake Charles Symphony, the Art and Humanities Council of Southwest Louisiana and the Literacy Council of Southwest Louisiana are located in the building, as is the Mardi Gras Museum, the only one open in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, says Vandever.

The Black Heritage Gallery and the Arts Associates Gallery are in the space; a children's theater uses the former school's auditorium with seating for 450.

Still, there could be more. "There is never enough studio space and there is a huge demand and a long list," says Vandever.

Demand is strong because the studios are priced by the city for the small wages earned by most artists. Alexander says rent is 50 cents per square foot, or \$350 per month, for her 700-square-foot studio. Her payment to the city also covers utilities and

cleaning services.

The city's return: The arts center can be a lively place. Alexander's opening in spring 2007 drew 300 to the center. The Michout Family concert in November was sold out, with a live broadcast from the center to National Public Radio.

Activists want more. The arts center is set for an upgrade, thanks to Friends of Central School and Laura Leach, whose family is prominent in Lake Charles business and who sits on the LSU Board of Supervisors. Friends are raising at least \$100,000 to start an endowment to pay for improvements, including a new plaza designed by architect Joe Champeaux. His firm of Champeaux, Evans and Hotard is not charging for the design.

Champeaux says the plaza will include oak trees, a small monument to balance three others already at the arts center, benches arranged to create a space for small performances and new lighting. Construction should begin in spring.

"I believe that the fact that residents were willing to pay for this building speaks to how the community feels about it," says Vandever. "It's the last link to all those wonderful pieces of architecture that were built at about the same time. People want to hold onto the past, and to celebrate it." •



A member of the Studio 347 art collective works on a painting. The women meet once a week at the old Central School.

Bradie James

LINEBACKER, PHILANTHROPIST

TIM MUELLER

He is a streak of blue, silver and white, flickering across TV screens, moving faster and faster toward a man running at him, taking him down to cheers of millions.

He does this Sundays, sprinting from his linebacker position for the Dallas Cowboys to level the opposition.

But today, with no pads or helmet, Bradie James sits calmly, his emotions swinging between melancholy and upbeat, talking about his mother, who died of breast cancer in the same year he lost his father to liver disease.

It was 2001. Bradie was working harder than ever. Keep it up, his coach Nick Saban told him, and you will play in the NFL. That wasn't his goal. He toiled to escape. "I was just trying to keep busy with football so I wouldn't have to think about my mother."

His mother, Etta, tried to keep her boy safe from her decline. "By the time I found out, it was near the end."

His mother died in his sophomore year.

Talking about the loss now is for healing. Establishing Foundation 56, a donor advised fund of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, was for hope. Through its Soul Survivors program, the foundation asks poorer women to be screened for breast cancer. They usually avoid early detection out of worry that breast cancer would require time off for treatment. Who would take care of their families, they fear?

In videos shown at LSU and Southern games, James has promoted early detection. He wants to fund a breast cancer screening van, a way to reach women who live in rural areas.

The message: Get screened because your families, men like Bradie, need you for many years.

When he stepped on this path, Bradie James didn't know why. Six years after saying goodbye to his mother, he has the answer. "I get to save lives."

—Mukul Verma

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