

# CURRENTS

*fourth quarter 2020*

BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION

*braf.org*

*The*  
**LONELIEST PLACE**  
*in Louisiana*







The Baton Rouge Area Foundation and the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana raised more than \$8.5 million for hurricane relief and recovery.

PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER





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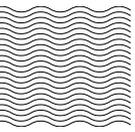
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**“Mother Nature’s wrath is hard to contend with. It is a sad reality for an area of Louisiana that offers charm, natural beauty and an abundance of natural resources.”**



*Editor’s Note: Rev. Chris Andrews writes a guest column for this issue. He spent his childhood in Creole, which is among towns in Cameron Parish that have been mostly erased this year by hurricanes Laura and Delta.*

**C**reole is a little hamlet in the southwest corner of Louisiana. Perhaps at one time it could have been called a village; it was never a town. There was one traffic light at the junction of the two main roads and a smattering of small businesses, mostly service stations and quick diners, that offered the only semblance of a “downtown.” The roads—there are only two, which bisect one another at the junction where the traffic light was—followed the high ground through the marsh leading either to Lake Charles to the north or the town of Cameron, the parish seat, to the southwest. Homes were built at the edge of the roads and the commu-

nity supported a robust population that farmed, fished, hunted and worked in the oil fields that popped up in the Gulf of Mexico.

My family lived in Creole in the early 50s. My dad moved us there because he wanted to build a small hospital to serve a rural area that was pretty much devoid of medical services. St. Gabriel Hospital and Pharmacy became the center of our family’s life for a few years. My parents built a house on the north side of the hospital and my dad walked over each day to serve as administrator and pharmacist. Dr. D. W. Dix was the resident physician. Patients came for treatment; babies were born, and the hospital served its mission of providing good medical care to the locals.

My brother and I enjoyed idyllic days playing with the Conner boys, J.R. and Bobby, who lived next door. We caught crawfish in the ditches that drained the marsh on the back side of our property. We thrilled at the cattle drives that

passed in front of the house and hospital, with real cowboys snapping whips over heads of cattle to keep them moving together and along. In summer there was a garden behind the Richard store that provided fresh vegetables. In the winter duck hunters showed up to be housed at the Conner home. For two little boys, Creole was magic, offering the adventure of nature and much to explore at the edge of the marsh that was right up to our property.

In 1957, Hurricane Audrey blew into Creole and Cameron. Its 125 mile-per-hour winds and 12-foot storm surge swept away most of the houses and other structures in Cameron Parish. More than 500 people perished in the wind and waves. The hospital that my father built came unmoored and floated for a while.

After Audrey, Creole built back and enjoyed almost 50 years without a major storm. Then came Hurricane Rita in 2005. Its winds and 17.8-foot storm

surge, the highest ever in Louisiana, destroyed the area once again. Even structures that survived Hurricane Audrey toppled from Rita's fury.

This time the community did not build back, at least not with the energy that followed Audrey. To be sure, buildings were built, homes were re-established and infrastructure was restored. But the footprint was much smaller.

Hurricane Ike hit three years later, in 2008, and flooded the parish. Once again, people moved away, never to return. By 2010 the population of Cameron Parish had declined by 79% from its peak.

Then came Hurricane Laura this year, on Aug. 27. The category 4 hurricane, with a storm surge higher than the remaining buildings, was just too much for Creole. The traffic light was blown away and "downtown" was reduced to rubble.

How much of nature's wrath can an area endure? Ferocious storms have taken their toll on this area of Louisiana. And although the parish has state-of-the-art public buildings—the library, school board office, schools, the courthouse—the people have mostly left.

What the future holds for Creole and Cameron Parish is unknown. An area needs people to be vibrant and viable and, sadly, that is what is lacking there. I have spoken to many who said they would not build back. They are moving north, to higher ground even if it means commuting to work in Cameron as oil field workers or public servants, which are about the only jobs available now.

There are some who will not leave. They have strong emotional ties to the land—farmers and trappers and duck hunting guides and fishermen. Those stalwart souls are making their plans to build back destroyed homes, albeit at a greatly increased cost due to regulations requiring structures to be

elevated and insurance rates that have soared in the aftermath of the storms.

But the bottom line is that Creole and Cameron Parish will always be in the crosshairs of major weather events. Hurricanes that blow in from the Gulf of Mexico will find their way to this area that sits right on the water's edge, only 3 feet above sea level. It is only a matter of time before another destructive storm hits. When it does, the will of more people will further wilt and they too will move away. Bit by bit, person by person, the area is depopulating. Schools will shutter, jobs will evaporate, and Cameron will become a ghost parish.

Because the area is rich in natural resources, like oil and gas and the Gulf fisheries, there will always be an economic incentive to come into the region. But to work, not to live. It is too emotionally expensive to endure being blown away by the next hurricane.

Creole and Cameron Parish will always have a special place in my heart. The people I have known there are simple, hard-working country people—the salt of the earth. But Mother Nature's wrath is hard to contend with. It is a sad reality for an area of Louisiana that offers charm, natural beauty and an abundance of natural resources. At this point in its history, perhaps the most fitting statement about this area is the sentence uttered by one of Hurricane Audrey's survivors as he witnessed the destructive water rush in: "It's all over but the crying."

*Rev. Chris Andrews is executive director of Rebuild Together Baton Rouge, a nonprofit that updates homes for older people so they can remain in them as long as possible. He also leads Jubilee Pioneers, a creative and inclusive spiritual community that celebrates the divine mystery in all of creation.*

## Baton Rouge Area Foundation

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BATON ROUGE LOUISIANA 70802

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Neva Butkus, *Forum 225*

*The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is a community foundation that takes advantage of opportunities to improve the quality of life in South Louisiana. We do so by providing three 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 education reform. Two, BRAF invests in and manages pivotal projects to improve the region. Three, we provide consulting services to nonprofits. For more information, contact Mukul Verma at [mverma@braf.org](mailto:mverma@braf.org).*

Currents is published four times a year by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. If you would like to be added to our distribution list, please contact us at 225.387.6126 or email the Foundation at [mverma@braf.org](mailto:mverma@braf.org).

## mission

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation unites human and financial resources to enhance the quality of life in South Louisiana.

To achieve our mission, we:

- serve our donors to build the assets that drive initiatives and solutions;
- engage community leaders to develop appropriate responses to emerging opportunities and challenges;
- partner with entities from our service area, as well as with other community foundations, in order to leverage our collective resources and create the capacity to be a stimulus of positive regional change; and,
- evaluate our work and share the results with our stakeholders.

*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*

## The Baton Rouge Area Foundation accomplishes its mission in three ways:

**1** We connect fund donors—philanthropists—to worthwhile projects and nonprofits. Over 55 years, our donors have granted more than \$500 million across South Louisiana and the world.

The Foundation offers several types of charitable funds, including donor-advised funds, which can be opened for a minimum of \$10,000. Contributions to the fund are tax deductible. Donors use these funds to make grants to nonprofits. The Foundation manages the money in the charitable accounts, offers

local knowledge about issues and nonprofits, and manages all the necessary paperwork.

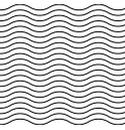
**2** We conduct civic leadership initiatives that change the direction of the Baton Rouge region and South Louisiana. Members support these projects, which solve fundamental problems. Tax-deductible memberships range from \$200 to \$25,000.

**3** We offer strategic consulting services to nonprofits.

## Key Civic Leadership Projects

**THE NEW MOBILITY:** The Foundation is trying to make it easier for people to get around the parish. We are participating with local and state government on several projects that give residents transportation choices. Engineers say that more choices reduce the burden on roads. The projects include a train connecting Baton Rouge to New Orleans and a bike sharing system that launched last year.

**BATON ROUGE HEALTH DISTRICT (BRHealthDistrict.org):** The parish asked the Foundation to pay for a master plan for the Bluebonnet, Perkins and Essen Lane corridor, where most of the health care assets are located. The plan has been adopted by the parish, and an independent nonprofit—the Baton Rouge Health District—is implementing the plan.



## LAKES PROJECT ADVANCES

**BREC AND LSU** have each approved agreements that provide the framework for deepening and enhancing City Park/University lakes. The two, along with local government and the state, have already pledged funding for the project. In the first phase, four of six lakes will be dredged, with materials moved to shape the shore for safe paths, new parks and lush promenades.

The project is being overseen by LSU Real Estate and Facilities Foundation. LSU REFF's project advisor, CSRS, separately is seeking engineering and

design firms to oversee the project, to identify stumps and to draw construction documents based on the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's \$1 million master plan. Engineers will be chosen by year-end, with dredging expected to commence in late summer 2021.

The lakes aren't designed for how people use them now. Paths don't go around the shore and are dangerously close to fast-moving cars in sections. Dredged from swamps in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the lakes are slowly turning into mudflats due to silting too.

On average, the water bodies are less than 3 feet deep.

The first phase should include deepening and reshaping City Park, Erie, Campus and College lakes, as well as pedestrian and bicycle path improvements around City Park and Campus lakes. The Foundation and our partners are pursuing additional funding to complete the entire project as quickly as possible. You can read the master plan at [BatonRougeLakes.org](http://BatonRougeLakes.org).



TIM MUELLER

## GRANITE STREAM IS COMING TO WATER CAMPUS

The sparkling stream on The Water Campus will begin flowing in January, a few months later than expected because a granite section cracked. Custom crafted by Kusser in Passau, Germany, the fountain was trucked from the New Orleans port to The Water Campus on Nicholson Drive in segments, where it was assembled. The fountain is made of two separate sections, each one about 70 feet long and 8 feet wide.

The stream is the centerpiece of the Campus' Town Square, situated between 200 Water Street, which consist of 20 lofts ready for leasing, and 1200 Brickyard Lane, a building in which researchers are applying water science to preserve coasts and communities in Louisiana and around the world.

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The inspiration for the stream is the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain in London. Water flowing over tiny granite dimples will sparkle like diamonds and butterflies.

The Foundation and Commercial Properties Realty Trust are co-developing The Water Campus on 35 acres off Nicholson Drive and the Mississippi River near the bridge. Organizations on the Campus are providing the best water science to policy-makers around the world.

## BRIDGE CENTER HIRING IN ADVANCE OF OPENING

The Bridge Center for Hope is hiring up to 130 employees to care for people suffering a crisis from mental illness and addiction. About half the workers will be peers who have overcome addictions and mental health issues.

RI International is the national provider that will run Bridge, which is under construction on Florida Boulevard across from Baton Rouge General Mid City. Bridge is slated to open in late December.

Serving up to 5,000 people per year, Bridge will offer detox services and longer stays for people who need more mental health care. About 70% of people who enter the center are released within 24 hours.

Baton Rouge Area Foundation started the Bridge Center as part of a project to improve mental health services. Now an independent nonprofit, Bridge is funded by a \$6 million annual tax to provide crisis stabilization services.



TIM MUELLER

## ENROLLMENT IN NSBR-BACKED SCHOOLS GROWS

Nearly one in four Baton Rouge students will attend a school backed by New Schools for Baton Rouge next year. This fall, 16 such schools enrolled 8,000 students. Next school year, 21 schools will educate 9,000 students, with capacity to grow to 12,500. Additional schools opening with NSBR support in 2021 include IDEA's third campus, a second BASIS school, KIPP at Capitol High School, Mentorship Legal Academy and Helix Aviation Academy. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation started NSBR with operating funding from Foundation donors. NSBR recruits and invests in high-performing charter schools while holding them accountable. NSBR's goal is to have a network of state-graded A and B schools.

## GABRIEL BUMP WINS GAINES BOOK AWARD

Chicago native Gabriel Bump's debut book, *Everywhere You Don't Belong*, has won the 2020 Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, which is presented by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

Now in its 14th year, the Gaines Book Award is a nationally acclaimed \$15,000 prize given annually to recognize outstanding work from promising African-American fiction writers. The award honors Louisiana native Ernest Gaines' extraordinary contribution to the international literary world. Gaines died in 2019 at his home in Oscar, Louisiana, at the age of 86.

*Everywhere You Don't Belong* is the both dark and humorous coming-of-age story of Claude McKay Love, a young man living with his grandmother on the South Side of Chicago during the 1990s.

In addition to honoring Bump's novel, the judges also recognized and short-listed the political thriller *The Coyotes of Carthage* by Steven Wright.

A national panel of judges selects the Gaines Award winner from among a large number of competitive submissions.



Gabriel Bump

JEREMY HANDRUP



## HURRICANE RESPONSE

### HURRICANE LAURA WAS FIRST.

In late August, like no storm in 150 years, she raked Southwest Louisiana with wind gusts surpassing 135 miles per hour. The damage is being tallied in the billions. More than 800,000 parish residents, from Cameron on the coast through Calcasieu and Allen in the north, had their lives upended by the storm. Recovery had begun when Hurricane Delta, with winds over 100

miles per hour, blew through the same area six weeks later.

Community foundations are the first to step into the breach after disasters. At the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, we worked with our affiliate in Lake Charles, the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, to raise more than \$8.5 million to respond to the two storms.

In the days after the storms, staff members of the foundations canvassed the region and tapped contacts to understand which needs were the greatest. Nonprofits had already established feeding posts, and grants were made to them to replenish their reserves. Grants were also made to nonprofits that were helping people dig out of debris to prepare for rebuilding.



TIM MUELLER

The next step is long-range planning to rebuild stronger and smarter for with-standing storms that are coming at Louisiana more often and with more destructive energy. David Filo, founder of Yahoo! who grew up in a Lake Charles suburb, and his wife, Angela, granted \$2.5 million for a master plan for the Calcasieu Parish region. Master planning will begin next year.

## OIL AND WATER

**LSU'S COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING** has joined a Tulane University-led consortium that will be one of three inaugural U.S.-Israel Energy Centers. The centers are focusing on improving the safety, efficiency and sustainability of offshore natural gas production. The five-year, \$27 million-initiative will partner with industry on new technologies for the fossil energy, energy storage and energy-water nexus sectors. Topics will span a range of fundamental and applied research, including subsea gas hydrates, advanced well control, and design of reactors and catalysts for methane conversion processes.

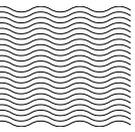
## PENNINGTON RESEARCHER WINS DIABETES GRANT

**NEW TREATMENTS FOR METABOLIC DISEASES**, such as type 2 diabetes, could emerge from a study of how a single enzyme controls the growth of the pancreatic cells that produce insulin. Researchers at Pennington Biomedical Research Center will investigate how the enzyme SGK1 regulates beta-cell mass when the body signals that more insulin is needed. The lab will also examine the mechanisms behind increases in the number of beta cells and changes in insulin production during calorie overload, obesity and insulin



Dr. Jason Collier

resistance. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases awarded Pennington's Jason Collier a five-year, \$1.8 million grant to fund the research.



# GRANTS

## THE BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION ISSUED

grants totaling \$5.44 million in the third quarter of 2020. Grants by organizations are listed below. The Foundation makes grants on behalf of people and organizations that open charitable funds with us. Our board also approves grants from unrestricted assets of the Foundation. If you are interested in learning more about donor-advised funds and other charitable funds, please call Elizabeth Hutchison at (225) 387-6126 or email her at ehutchison@braf.org.



### GRANTS / 3RD QUARTER 2020

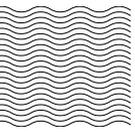
- Academic Distinction Fund \$40,413
- Acts of Love Inc. \$8,000
- Agenda for Children Inc. - New Orleans \$11,111
- Alameda County Community Food Bank \$100
- Alzheimer's Services of the Capital Area \$10,500
- American Cancer Society Inc. \$7,500
- American National Red Cross - Headquarters \$2,500
- American National Red Cross - Louisiana Capital Area \$10,303
- American Public Media Group \$100
- Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$231,197
- Arts Council of Pointe Coupee \$250
- Assumption Parish School Board - Labadieville Elementary School \$1,000
- Audubon Nature Institute Inc. \$5,000
- Bail Project Inc. \$100
- Baton Rouge Child Advocacy Center \$2,500
- Baton Rouge Christian Education Foundation Inc. - The Dunham School \$2,883
- Baton Rouge Community College \$2,000
- Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center Inc. \$3,632
- Baton Rouge Gallery Inc. \$5,000
- Baton Rouge Green Association Inc. \$17,619
- Baton Rouge Little Theater Inc. \$157
- Baton Rouge Opera Guild \$1,851
- Baton Rouge Police Department \$17,419
- Baton Rouge Youth Coalition Inc. \$55,000
- Baylor University \$2,000
- Board of the University of Alabama \$1,500
- Bogalusa City Schools - Byrd Avenue Primary School \$1,000
- Boy Scouts of America - Istrouma Area Council \$203,982
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$4,000
- BREC Foundation \$1,000
- Bridge Agency Inc. \$1,000
- Broadmoor Improvement Association Incorporated \$5,000
- Calcasieu Parish School Board - Combrel-Fondel Elementary School \$1,000
- Cambiar Education \$44,445
- Camelback Ventures Inc. \$11,112
- Camp Van Dorn World War II Museum \$250
- Cancer Services Inc. \$7,500
- Cape Eleuthera Foundation Inc. \$10,000
- Capital Area Alliance for the Homeless \$5,000
- Capital Area Animal Welfare Society \$303
- Capital Area United Way \$50,000
- Cat Haven Inc. \$2,500
- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge Inc. \$5,000
- Catholic High School Foundation \$1,678
- Center for Planning Excellence Inc. \$1,250
- Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Baton Rouge Inc./McMains Children's Development Center \$1,000
- Children's Cup \$3,200
- Chinese Christian Church of Baton Rouge \$280
- Christ School Inc. \$200
- Christ the King Parish and Catholic Center at LSU \$11,938
- City of Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge \$21,671
- City Year Inc. \$50,000
- Common Cause Education Fund \$1,000
- Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana \$1,500
- Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana Hurricane Relief and Recovery Fund \$190,703
- Companion Animal Alliance \$2,000
- Congaree Foundation \$50,000
- Congregation B'nai Israel of Baton Rouge \$28,500
- Cristo Rey Baton Rouge \$51,500
- Cystic Fibrosis Foundation - Baton Rouge \$500
- DEMCO Foundation Inc. \$3,947
- Dialogue on Race Louisiana \$5,000
- Diocese of Lake Charles \$10,000
- Dog Ranch Rescue Inc. \$10,000
- Douglas Manship Sr. Theatre Complex Holding Inc. \$129,291
- Ducks Unlimited Inc. \$131



Dutchtown High School \$1,000	Girls on the Run South Louisiana \$250	King of Kings Ministries Inc. / King of Kings Community Jerusalem \$750
Dyslexia Association of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$602	Global Hunger Project \$150	Kudvumisa Foundation USA Inc. \$1,500
East Baton Rouge Office of the Public Defender \$36,920	Govern For America \$11,111	L.P. Vaughn Elementary School \$1,000
East Feliciana Parish School Board \$262	Grace Episcopal Church \$300	LABI Foundation \$50,000
EBRPSS - Glen Oaks Park Elementary School \$1,000	Grambling State University \$500	Leadership Ascension Foundation \$5,000
EBRPSS - McKinley High School \$1,000	Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank Inc. \$2,000	Life Action Ministries \$300
EBRPSS - Westdale Heights Academic Magnet School \$1,000	Gulf Coast State College \$1,500	Life of a Single Mom \$5,000
EdNavigator Inc. \$155,556	Habitat for Humanity of Greater Baton Rouge \$7,500	Living Word Church of Muskegon \$600
Education Alliance of Washoe County \$30,000	Hannah's Klozet \$2,000	Longue Vue House and Gardens \$2,500
Emerge Center Inc. \$7,145	Healthnetwork Foundation \$1,000	Louisiana Art and Science Museum Inc. \$24,314
Empower 225 \$1,000	Helping Hands for Honduras Inc. \$50,000	Louisiana Bar Foundation \$700
Environmental Defense Fund Incorporated \$500	Heritage Ranch \$5,050	Louisiana Department of Education \$10,721
EPSB - Chataignier Elementary School \$1,000	Holy Family Catholic Church \$32,086	Louisiana Food Bank Association / Feeding Louisiana \$500,000
First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge \$1,500	Houston Chamber Choir \$1,000	Louisiana Key Academy \$2,000
First United Methodist Church \$4,100	Howard University \$1,000	Louisiana Landmarks Society Inc. \$100
Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina \$10,000	Humanities Amped \$3,500	Louisiana Preservation Alliance Inc. \$100
Foundation for a Better Louisiana \$500	Iberia Parish School System - Delcambre Elementary School \$1,000	Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College \$50,750
Foundation for Excellence in Louisiana Public Broadcasting \$1,550	Iberville Foundation for Academic Excellence \$5,665	Louisiana Superintendents Academy \$22,222
Foundation for Historical Louisiana Inc. / Preserve Louisiana \$24,804	Iglesia Congregacional Casa de Dios \$500	Louisiana Symphony Association / Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra \$20,000
Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University \$20,000	Innocence Project New Orleans \$100	LPSB - South Fork Elementary School \$2,000
Friends of Alcoholics Inc. \$1,000	InspireNOLA Charter Schools - 42 Charter School \$1,000	LSU Foundation \$38,000
Friends of Louisiana Public Broadcasting Inc. \$10,500	International Center for Journalists Inc. \$11,000	LSU Foundation - Department of Libraries \$50,000
Friends of Magnolia Mound Plantation Inc. \$1,000	International Hospitality Foundation LSU \$565	LSU Foundation - E.J. Ourso College of Business \$50,000
Friends of Rosedown Inc. \$100	International Rescue Committee Inc. \$150	LSU Foundation - Friends of French Studies \$100
Friends of the Baton Rouge Zoo \$1,500	IPSB - East Iberville Elementary School \$1,000	LSU Foundation - LSU Ag Center Botanic Gardens at Burden \$150,100
Friends of the Old State Capitol \$350	IPSB - Iberville Elementary School \$1,000	LSU Foundation - Manship School of Mass Communication Excellence Fund \$891
Front Yard Bikes \$500	ISKCON of Mississippi Inc. \$6,000	LSU Foundation - University Lab School Foundation \$23,167
Fusion Youth Outreach Ministry \$2,000	James Dick Foundation for the Performing Arts \$1,000	Maison des Ami of Louisiana Inc. \$16,500
GaitWay Therapeutic Horsemanship \$33,500	Jefferson Parish Public School System - Washington Elementary School \$28,039	Manners of the Heart \$1,000
Gardere Community Christian School \$10,000	Jones County Junior College \$500	Map 1040 \$1,500
General Health System Foundation \$5,345	Joyce Theater Foundation Inc. \$25,000	Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center \$5,500
Georgia Institute of Technology \$1,500	Junior Achievement of Greater Baton Rouge and Acadiana \$250	Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center Foundation \$5,000
	Junior League of Raleigh \$25,000	
	Kappa Alpha Order Educational Foundation \$100	
	Kids' Orchestra Inc. \$1,000	

MetroMorphosis \$23,222	Raphael Village \$1,000	St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Inc. \$1,000
Mid City Gras Inc. \$2,500	Rapides Parish School Board - W.O. Hall Elementary School \$1,000	St. Jude the Apostle Catholic School \$982
Mid City Redevelopment Alliance Inc. \$5,000	Rebuilding Together Baton Rouge Inc. \$10,000	St. Lillian Academy \$1,000
Millsaps College \$1,500	Red Shoes Inc. \$6,000	St. Luke's Episcopal Church \$6,590
Miracle League of Louisiana Inc. \$500	Reliant Mission Inc. \$1,500	St. Martin Parish School Board - Breaux Bridge Elementary \$1,000
Mississippi College \$500	Rhodes College \$2,500	St. Mary's Episcopal Church \$100
Mississippi State University \$1,500	Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge \$115,592	St. Paul's Holy Trinity Episcopal Church \$100
National Federation of the Blind Inc. \$15,000	Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge - Bishop Ott Works of Mercy Trust \$183	St. Philip Parish \$3,638
National Redistricting Foundation \$50,000	Rotary Club of Baton Rouge Inc. Foundation \$250	St. Theresa of Avila Middle School \$6,304
Nature Conservancy - Louisiana \$10,000	Rotary District 6200 Foundation \$1,000	St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Catholic High School \$14,390
New Orleans Career Center \$44,445	Russell Domingue Ministries Inc. / Blue Flames Ministries \$750	Sunshine Foundation Inc. \$1,000
New Orleans Museum of Art \$1,500	Save Cenla \$7,500	Tangipahoa Parish School System - Midway Elementary School \$1,000
New Schools for Baton Rouge \$15,000	Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana \$1,500	Tangipahoa Parish School System - O.W. Dillon Leadership Academy \$1,000
New Schools for New Orleans Inc. \$311,111	SJA Foundation \$550	Tanzania Education Corp. \$110,000
New York Institute of Technology \$1,500	Southeastern Development Foundation Inc \$25,000	Texas A&M University \$1,500
Nicholls State University \$1,000	Southeastern Louisiana University \$7,000	The Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund \$60,500
NWEA \$111,112	Southern Garden Symposium \$100	The Ascension Fund Inc. \$16,108
O'Brien House Inc. \$500	Southern Methodist University \$1,500	The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta Inc. \$38,963
Ochsner Clinic Foundation \$548,000	Southern University and A&M College \$2,500	The Friends of the Rural Life Museum Inc. \$100
Of Moving Colors Productions \$1,000	Southern University System Foundation \$3,000	The Original Richland Library Restoration Society Inc. \$802
Ollie Steele Burden Manor Inc. \$351	Spacetaker / Fresh Arts \$750	The Salvation Army - Baton Rouge \$1,227
Opera Louisiane Inc. \$1,000	Spanish-Speaking Unity Council of Alameda County Inc. \$100	The Tanzania Wildlife Fund Inc. / African Rainforest Conservancy \$2,500
Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church \$500	St. Alban's Chapel \$5,000	The University of Mississippi \$2,500
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church \$37,571	St. Aloysius Catholic Church \$500	The University of Tennessee, Knoxville \$1,500
Our Lady of the Lake Foundation \$34,300	St. Augustine Church \$934	The University of Texas at Austin \$1,500
Our Voice Nuestra Voz \$33,334	St. Charles Parish Public Schools - St. Rose Elementary School \$1,000	The Writing Revolution Inc. \$12,500
Pahara Institute \$55,556	St. Gabriel Catholic Church \$5,000	Three O'Clock Project \$1,000
Particular Council of St. Vincent de Paul of Baton Rouge Louisiana \$1,000	St. Gerard Majella Church \$11,000	Thrive Foundation \$50,000
Pastoral Center \$26,714	St. Helena Catholic Church \$5,000	Trey McIntyre Project Ltd. \$25,000
Pearl River Community College \$3,500	St. James Episcopal Church \$2,000	United Methodist Committee on Relief \$250
Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation \$25,000	St. James Episcopal Day School \$25,000	United Way of Beaumont and North Jefferson County \$10,000
Planned Parenthood of the Gulf Coast Inc. \$750	St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church \$17,658	United Way of Brazoria County \$5,000
Planting Justice \$100	St. Joseph Cathedral \$1,000	United Way of Greater Houston \$15,000
Preservation Alliance of New Orleans/ Preservation Resource Center \$100	St. Joseph the Worker Church \$6,073	United Way of Lamar County \$15,000
Propel America \$177,778		
Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana Inc. \$1,000		
Purple Songs Can Fly \$1,000		

United Way of Morgan County \$7,500  
 United Way of Southeast Louisiana \$7,500  
 United Way of Southwest Louisiana Inc.  
 \$20,000  
 United Way of St. Charles \$1,000  
 United Way of the Coastal Bend Inc. \$7,500  
 United Way Retirees Association \$1,000  
 University of Louisiana at Lafayette \$500  
 University of Louisiana at Lafayette Foundation  
 \$1,000  
 University of Louisiana at Monroe \$2,000  
 University of Southern Mississippi \$7,000  
 University Presbyterian Church \$26,650  
 Urban League of Louisiana \$2,000  
 Volunteers In Public Schools Inc. \$51,000  
 Volunteers of America Inc. \$6,000  
 We the Protesters Inc. \$100  
 West Baton Rouge Foundation for Academic  
 Excellence \$6,099  
 Winston-Salem Foundation \$38,963  
 World Central Kitchen Incorporated \$1,000  
 WRKF Public Radio Inc. \$1,500  
 Xavier University of Louisiana \$1,250  
 Yale University \$1,000  
 YWCA of Greater Baton Rouge \$25,500



# Housing isn't enough

## Choice Grant aims to break poverty cycle

BY MAGGIE HEYN RICHARDSON | PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER

**T**he 50-year-old Baton Rouge public housing development Ardenwood Village is slated to eventually be decommissioned, but what will replace it is unlike any other public housing experiment to date in the Capital City.

Ardenwood Village's 93 families will move in phases into four newly built clusters of modern, mixed-income housing. The new Ardendale development will be interlaced with greenspaces and outlined in sidewalks. Children will play safely in outdoor "tot lots," neighbors will enjoy a centrally located community park with a rain garden and a bikeshare station, and everyone will have access to free wireless.

Welcome to Baton Rouge's first Choice Neighborhood, an experiment soon to be underway and funded by a \$29.5 million award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Baton Rouge was one of four cities to receive a highly competitive Choice Neighborhoods Grant last year, the planning for which began in 2013.

Choice grants are distinct in two ways. First, they relocate residents of aging public housing developments to new mixed-income developments that hold both market rate and affordable housing. Second, they require significant community investment to develop or expand human services programming

in the surrounding neighborhood. In this case, that means an approximately 2-square-mile jigsaw swath bordered by Choctaw Drive, Lobdell Avenue, Ardenwood Drive, North Foster Drive and Florida Boulevard.

From a new early childcare center run by the YWCA, to community gardens run by the Walls Project's Baton Roots program, to real estate investment opportunities facilitated by the East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority and Build Baton Rouge, a significant amount of energy is being aimed at the Ardendale area, which, along with Ardenwood Village includes the neighborhoods of Smiley Heights, Melrose East and East Fairfields.

"To really transform a community, you have to focus on building resiliency in families, and the Choice grants give us the best chance to do that," says J. Daniels, CEO of the East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority, the Choice grant's lead convener. "This is about so much more than housing."

HUD's Choice Neighborhoods Grants launched in 2010, part of national reckoning about how to break the generational poverty cycle in public housing. At their core, the Choice grants pay for updates to aging housing developments that need to be decommissioned. But rather than raze old buildings and replace them with new public housing, the grants reassign families to affordable units within market rate develop-

ments. It's an effective way to leverage ongoing private investment using public funds, says Daniels.

Meanwhile, community partners collaborate to spark neighborhood improvements in job acquisition, education, health, public safety and other quality-of-life measures.

Baton Rouge was able to show \$335.5 million in existing or planned projects in the target area to match the nearly \$30 million in grant funds. Daniels says HUD's award will be distributed over four cost centers: People, \$4 million; Housing, \$20 million; Neighborhood, \$3 million and Demolition, \$2 million.

Within the next nine months, the Housing Authority will acquire a 25-acre parcel of land south of Ardenwood Village from Build Baton Rouge for Phase 1 of the project, which will see the construction of 172 mixed income units. Forty of the 93 families currently living in Ardenwood Village will take residence here, while other units in the development will be rented at market rate.

"Having market rate housing allows for more private investment in the neighborhood," says Daniels. "And you'll see a lot of variation of housing types in the design including duplexes, quadruplexes and townhouses."

Three additional phases will follow, each completed within a year of the last. Phase 2 will see the construction of a senior facility that will face



**CIVIC PROJECTS**





***“To really transform a community, you have to focus on building resiliency in families, and the Choice grants give us the best chance to do that.”***

—J. Daniels, CEO of the East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority

Ardenwood Drive. Phase 3 includes a 95-unit building, and Phase 4, a 97-unit building. Each phase absorbs a portion of the remaining public housing families. Once all families have been moved, Ardenwood Village will be decommissioned and demolished.

The Atlanta-based Ascent Project is managing the human development arm of the project, a key component in helping the 93 Ardenwood Village families, 92% of which are led by African American female heads of household, find the services and opportunities they need to become self-sufficient. Ascent Project staff will interview each family and help them set goals about where their lives need the most support. Childcare, health care, educational opportunities and job training are all part of the compendium of resources being made available to Ardendale residents.

For example, a new \$11 million YWCA Early Head Start facility will be built on the east side of the development, a short distance from the Phase 1 development. It will offer free childcare for children from birth to three years old, and will include parenting classes, mental health and disability screening, and educational referrals for children who exhibit learning challenges.

An arts district is planned for Renoir Drive, led by the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge, Forward Arts and other arts organizations. Daniels says an application was recently submitted to the state Department of Culture,

Recreation and Tourism to designate the area a Louisiana Cultural District.

“We want to see this become a kind of Magazine Street,” Daniels says, “where you would have affordable studio spaces for artists along with community arts programming.”

Connectivity to the surrounding area is a major grant objective. A high percentage of the residents of Ardenwood Village and others in the neighborhood don’t have cars, so the project captures opportunities for multi-modal transportation, including a planned Bus Rapid Transit line for Florida Boulevard and a new two-lane road with sidewalks and bike paths connecting Ardenwood Drive and Lobdell Boulevard. The

.3-mile Ardenwood-Lobdell connector is part of the MoveEBR program, a \$3 million Complete Streets project that will connect the east and west sides of Ardendale, giving residents better access to assets like Melrose Elementary, Capitol Middle, the McKay Automotive Technology Center, Baton Rouge Community College, several charter schools, the Eden Park Library and many others.

The budget for the connector, as well as a wetlands mitigation study for the area it traverses, will be completed in the next few months.

“Linking residents to neighborhood amenities is a big priority,” says Daniels. “This is part of how we will see transformational change in the area.” ■



TIM MUELLER

J. Daniels, East Baton Rouge Housing Authority

Broadmoor High School freshman Sha'Lisia Paul learns computer coding at the EBR Career & Technical Education Center. She may be among the first Baton Rouge students to graduate with a high school and associate's degree at the same time.





# Double down

## *New program lets students earn high school, college degree at same time*

BY SARA BONGIORNI | PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER

**M**arcus Turner has big plans, even heroic ones. The Broadmoor High School freshman hopes to study technology in college to prepare for a career as a cybersecurity expert for the U.S. Army—either that or a pilot for the U.S. Air Force.

Military service runs in the Turner family. The ninth-grader's grandfather was in the Navy. He is a member of Junior ROTC at Broadmoor. He is thinking about West Point or the Air Force Academy after high school graduation in 2024.

Technology is another natural fit for the 14-year-old honors student. He started tinkering with a computer at home when he was 11 or 12. He likes deciphering how the machines work as much as gaming. "For me, computers and technology are fun."

Marcus is getting a jump start on that college technology degree as one of four students in the Early College Academy's freshman class.

A partnership of Baton Rouge Community College and the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, the curriculum blends traditional high school and college-level classes to give students the opportunity to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate's degree at the same time.

Students choose a pathway to one of two associate's degrees so far—information technology or automotive technol-

ogy—but the program will add options as it grows, including a process-technology curriculum in 2021-22.

The goal is to equip students with specialized skills essential for high-wage jobs that are in high demand in the regional economy if they decide to go to work right after high school.

The program is the first of its kind in Baton Rouge, and it is of special interest to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, which for more than a decade has worked to expand educational opportunities in the Ardendale neighborhood north of Florida Boulevard.

In fact, the new program extends a landmark project in that effort: the 2018 opening of the state-of-the-art EBR Career & Technical Education Center, CTEC, on Lobdell Avenue in the heart of Ardendale.

Early College Academy students divide their school days between their traditional high school campus, where they take core classes and participate in sports, clubs and other activities. The other half of the day is spent at the high-tech CTEC campus, which offers industry-shaped training in manufacturing, building trades, technology and other high-skill vocations.

Students interested in automotive technology get training at the McKay Automotive Technology Center next door at BRCC's Ardendale campus. The center's 2017 opening was another milestone achievement in the Foundation's

long-running work to improve education, housing and quality of life in Ardendale.

Early College Academy students are the first freshmen to take classes at CTEC, whose students until now have been rising high school juniors and seniors. Each of CTEC's 154 students earn some kind of college credit or industry certification, but only Early College Academy students complete an associate's degree by high school graduation.

The launch of the Early College Academy is worth noting for another reason. Officials got it up and running amid the uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic. Two years of planning culminated in the March announcement of a memorandum of understanding between BRCC and the EBR school district to start the program this fall. The pandemic closed schools in Baton Rouge the same week.

It was a major disruption, but not a derailment. School officials worked to get word out about the program over the summer. They had hoped for 20 students but ended up with four, all honors students at Broadmoor, in what is essentially a pilot program. Classes were online at first, gradually transitioning to in-person instruction.



## FOUNDATION FACT

A comprehensive civic project of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation has focused on education outcomes. Partnerships in the project have produced the McKay Automotive Technology Center, the EBR Career & Technical Education Center and the formation of New Schools for Baton Rouge to recruit and support exceptional nonprofit schools.



Instructor Jacqueline Edwards helps Broadmoor High School freshman Marcus Turner during the Introduction to Programming 1 class at the EBR Career & Technical Education Center.

"It will grow in time," said Summer Dann, CTEC's executive director.

This year's freshman class includes Breana Sanders, 14. She says she didn't intend to enroll in the new program. Her mother signed her up. "It was a surprise," she says.

Breana is an avid reader of Harry Potter books and loves math and science, but she was nervous about the idea of early college, including a computer coding class. It took her about a week to gain confidence. "I like the idea that a computer has its own language," Breana says. "There's a logic to it."

She thinks about going to work as a computer technician after high school but wants to keep her options open. "We'll wait and see," Breana says.

Benjamin Hall was inspired to study automotive technology by a car-repair wizard on YouTube. His father and grandfather are also sources of inspiration: both worked as mechanics.

The 15-year-old swimmer and musician wants to go to college to study physical therapy. Working as an automotive technician after high school will help him pay for college, life and fixing up a

1994 Chevy Corvette—his favorite car.

"The hands-on experience I'm getting is honestly my favorite part of school," Benjamin says.

Sha'Lisa Paul, 14, began playing around with computers at age 10. She is an avid photographer who brings her camera when she takes her chihuahua on weekend and afternoon walks. She is always on lookout for flowers and other signs of nature in the city.

She looked right at home at a computer screen covered in glowing lines of code on a Tuesday morning inside one of CTEC's sunny classrooms. "It's a learning process," Sha'Lisa says of coding.

She thinks about a future working in technology, but becoming a nurse, maybe going out of state to study for an advanced degree in nursing, also appeals to her.

While its first four students are all honors students, the Early College Academy is open to ninth- and tenth-graders with a C average. "The biggest thing is to have a lot of love for what you're pursuing," says CTEC director Daphne Hughes-Alex. "That's what's important." ■

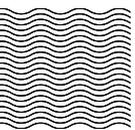
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*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*

The logo for the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, featuring the organization's name in a serif font with a decorative flourish underneath.



*The*  
**LONELIEST**  
**PLACE**  
*in Louisiana*

BY C.E. RICHARD | PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER

“*H*urricane Laura knocked all the leaves off these trees,” says James Doxey, pausing to gaze up into the boughs of the enormous oaks, all snatched bald by 150 mile-per-hour winds on August 27.

“The next month, you should have seen how pretty the leaves came back. They come back real pretty, and then Hurricane Delta comes and knocks all the branches off six weeks later.” Something in Doxey’s voice suggests a doubt that that these oaks will bud again.

Five named storms struck the Louisiana coast in 2020, breaking records.

But no part of the state was hit harder this year than Cameron Parish, with Hurricanes Laura and Delta coming in quick succession.







Doxey wades through a patch of tall grass ringed by centuries-old trees where the family home used to be. All that remains are the brick piers it rested on and steps leading up to nothing.

Built in 1847, the Doxey House was a well-known landmark in Cameron Parish. It had been a prosperous cotton farm for generations, perched above the surrounding marshlands upon a fertile ridge. During Hurricane Audrey, neighbors swam there to take shelter under its upstairs eaves when their own homes washed away. Constructed entirely from cypress, the Doxey House had weathered not only legendary storms like Audrey, Rita and Ike, but dozens of others through the years whose names no longer come to mind as easily.

But when Laura took it, she left nothing behind—not a single plank, joist, or stud. Every splinter of the old wooden home was uprooted and swept into the sky, most likely by a tornado. Now, there's only a naked lot where the Doxey House used to be.

“That’s one thing that really hurts,” Doxey says, toeing dirt where the house stood. “Not being able to see your landmarks.”

Cameron is Louisiana’s largest parish and its least populous. Most of it is marsh. What little land there is unfolds in long ridges called cheniers, a French word referring to the ancient oak groves that anchored the land in place. Once the defining feature of Cameron’s flat, amphibious landscape, those great oaks evolved a tolerance for strong winds and even occasional saltwater.

Now, however, the trees are withered skeletons of their former grandeur. The

vast expanse of surrounding marshlands is strewn with debris— boats and barges dragged inland by the surge, rusting pick-up trucks, enormous oil tanks crushed like empty beer cans. Very little still stands upright anymore. Even lifelong residents struggle to orient themselves in an unvarying landscape now comprised of nothing but empty horizons in every direction and strewn with ruins as far as eyes can see.

Too small to call it a town, Creole is the largest population center in Cameron Parish, clustering around a crossroads traffic light where Highways 82 and 27 intersect. Doxey can rattle off the businesses that once faced each other at the four corners: a grocery store, a gas station, a convenience shop, a restaurant. These are the places where people gathered and neighbors greeted each other, small outposts of society amid the lonely sprawl of the marsh. Everything there is leveled now. There’s not a soul to be seen for miles, and the only sound is the wind whipping a torn tent canopy, set up as a temporary aid station in the parking lot where the grocery store used to be.

With each hurricane, fewer and fewer residents return. Before the storms of 2020, Creole counted its population at 700; Cameron, the seat of government for the parish, was even smaller, with just 400.

Sixty-year-old James Doxey knows that many of his neighbors will not be back. He vividly recalls surveying the destruction left by Hurricane Rita from a Blackhawk helicopter, along with other public officials. At that time, in 2005, he was an elected member of the

James Doxey, left, at what remains of his family home that was built in 1847. Hurricane Laura took it, every plank, joist and stud.



parish police jury. From the air, he saw his neighbors' houses heaped along the banks of the Intercoastal Canal, washed inland from miles away. Many of those wrecked homes sat in the marsh for three years before they were all cleaned up. There was much more debris after Rita, Doxey explains, simply because there were more people living in Cameron Parish when that storm came ashore.

"In the six-mile radius of my district, I had something like 1700 voters," he recalls. "After Rita hit, maybe 150 came back. Three years later when Ike hit, we ended up with maybe 100."

Doxey handles facilities maintenance for the Cameron Parish School Board. Through the years, he has seen the local schools destroyed, rebuilt, merged and destroyed again. With each reopening, the classrooms are emptier. South Cameron High School, rebuilt after Rita, is a spacious, modern building, elevated and streamlined to withstand storms. Looking more like a small junior college than a high school, it has room to accommodate at least 400-500 students. Before the 2020 hurricane season, just over 200 students were enrolled there, and that was for grades K-12. All four of Cameron Parish's far-flung schools have been consolidated as K-12.

"We're hopeful that we'll be back with somewhere around 180 students at South Cameron, based on the feedback we've gotten from parents and students," says Charley Lemons, the superintendent of schools for the parish. He's been

on the job for two-and-a-half years. "Now, obviously, that may not happen right away."

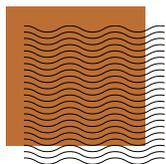
He expects families to begin trickling back slowly, but he notes that even now, more than two months after Laura, many of them have no place to stay in Cameron Parish, and even those lucky enough to still have a blue-tarped roof over their heads may be without power for many more months to come. Nevertheless, the young superintendent is determined to pull the school system back together and make it work.

"The schools are the glue that hold the communities together," Lemons says. "If we lose a school, the little community it serves doesn't have a lot left. So it's our full intention to keep them all up and operating as best we can."

The community cohesion that schools create was never more apparent in Cameron Parish than on Friday nights during football season. With little else for residents to do and few places to congregate, high school football games became a focal point of community life, drawing passionate spectators from all throughout the nearly 2,000 square miles within the parish lines.

"Back in the day, the South Cameron Tarpons was the team to beat in Louisiana," grins James Doxey. "Friday nights, well, they might as well shut off the lights in the rest of Cameron because everyone was in the stands."

Charley Lemons talks warmly of the pride and tradition associated with high school football in Cameron Parish. He



**FOUNDATION FACT**

The Foundation partnered to create The Water Institute of the Gulf. It provides coastal science for adapting to shifting shorelines in Louisiana and around the world. The Foundation also is working with Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana on a master plan for Cameron and Calcasieu parishes in response to the hurricanes of 2020.

In Cameron Parish, where Louisiana highways 27 and 82 meet, Hurricane Laura flattened stores and buildings on the corners.





**“The only thing left now is Venture Global and Keiwit. If it wasn’t for them, Cameron would be finished. They wouldn’t have no reason to even bring power back down here.”**

—James Doxey, Cameron native



No place to sleep in Cameron Parish. Hurricanes Laura and Delta took out houses and hotels, tossed oil tanks and crushed cars. The people of Cameron wonder if their place will be a home again.

remembers one game in particular from the fall of 2008 when he was teaching at Kinder High School, a rival in a neighboring parish to the north.

“After Hurricane Ike, the Tarpons came to Kinder. We were their first game. And they beat us!” Lemons says. “They beat us two days after the hurricane came in, like it was nothing!”

Lemons is also proud of the education students get in their schools. The motto on the school board’s website is “Preparing the Future of Cameron Parish, One Student at a Time.” But, looking at the widespread devastation here, it’s hard to imagine what the future of Cameron will look like for those students.

“When I graduated in ’78, I was working at Conoco as a crane operator,” Doxey says. Back then, the oil industry was booming. “We had fifteen rigs working out of that one base, and there were seven, eight, maybe nine bases, each with the same number of rigs. You could quit a job in the morning at one place, go to another yard, and pick up that same job in the afternoon.”

It’s not that way anymore.

Many in the parish have pinned their hopes on Venture Global’s new liquid natural gas facility that’s being built in the little hamlet of Hackberry. Kiewit Louisiana is the company that was selected to design and construct the massive LNG plant and it enjoys a good





reputation among the people of the area. The construction site has been far and away the busiest place in Cameron for some time.

“Man, in the morning, they got a line of cars going in that stretches for a mile,” Doxey says. He estimates the site employs approximately 1,500 workers, with talk of doubling that number in the near future. But the buzz of activity and employment there is misleading, he suggests.

“All those cars you see, that’s not people who live in Cameron Parish. They’re coming in from Lake Charles and other places. The company busses in a lot of its workers.” When the facility is completed, he adds, those construction jobs will vanish.

Doxey remembers when Cameron Parish supported a more diverse industrial base. Much of it was centered on the region’s rich fisheries and, in particular, on menhaden, known by most as the humble pogie fish. Sportsmen regard pogies as “trash fish,” but they can be processed into many valuable products, from nutritional fish oils to fertilizers to animal feed.

“When I was growing up, we had three menhaden processing plants,” says Doxey. “Each plant had at least three or four hundred workers in the summertime, and there was work all winter in maintenance.”

Doxey’s uncle was a local pogie fisherman here at a time when each fish was worth about a dollar for the oil and meal processed from it. During the season, fleets of big commercial fishing boats crowded the waters off Holly Beach, supplying the processors onshore. Some



“

***In Louisiana, if you can't eat in a place, then the place doesn't really exist. If all your restaurants and funky little bars are gone, then your culture is the next thing to go.***

—Kinder Baumgardner, SWA Group community planner



fleets came to Cameron from as far away as North Carolina, bringing lots of money to spend at local businesses.

“Shoot, the Smith Plant had probably built 25 or 30 houses for their people, the captains and crew, you know, when they'd be here for the season.”

In its heyday, Cameron Parish was the center of the menhaden industry in this country, with most of the 1.2 billion pounds harvested annually from the Gulf coming from Louisiana waters. One of Cameron's plants, Omega Protein, employed 1,100 workers during the fishing season, with 500 permanent employees working the off season. Omega was the last of the pogie plants, closing its Cameron facilities in 2013 after 65 years of operation. With it went an entire maritime way of life.

“It's all gone now,” says Doxey. “So this LNG facility that's coming, the few permanent workers they're going to bring here, it's no match for what we used to have with the pogie plants and the oil business. The only thing left now is Venture Global and Keiwit. If it wasn't for them, Cameron would be finished. They wouldn't have no reason to even bring power back down here.”

Of course, a community is much more



than the industries employing its people.

Kinder Baumgardner works for SWA in Houston, a planning and design firm that helps to build more livable communities. He says one thing that makes a community more than just a collection of dwellings is shared history and culture. However, people also need a context in which to share that history and culture with their neighbors.

“There's a lot of community spirit in these small towns,” Baumgardner says. He has known Louisiana's southwestern corner since childhood through family connections to the region. “But unless



The Docksides Grill in the City of Cameron. With few customers, the places where people crossed paths with their neighbors won't reopen.

they have places and events where they can exhibit it and share their local identity, that spirit gets hidden away and, over time, the cultural integrity starts to erode.”

For a community to remain robust, residents have to have places to go besides their jobs and their homes, places where they can gather in groups. To illustrate, Baumgarden points to the role that the volunteer fire station plays in many rural communities, hosting gumbo cookoffs or other fundraising events. It's about much more than the money they raise, he says.

“So you get together with your neighbors and have conversations about things that are important to the people who live in the area, conversations you wouldn't have otherwise without this shared civic space,” he says. If folks can't gather in groups, “then it's hard for the community to thrive.”

Social life grows spontaneously when locals can gather regularly to share food, drink and conversation, for example. That's especially important in a place like Cameron Parish.

“In Louisiana, if you can't eat in a place, then the place doesn't really

exist,” Baumgarden says. “If all your restaurants and funky little bars are gone, then your culture is the next thing to go.”

T-Boy's, a popular cowboy bar and steakhouse at the crossroads in Creole, was one of those places. Before it was called T-Boy's, that corner had been continuously anchored by a restaurant since 1932 when the parents of Robert Landry, aged 87, opened the Landry Café there.

“All the local people would come, drink a little beer, eat a hamburger or whatever,” Landry says. He recalls, as a boy, sleeping under the busy countertops where his mother and father set up the regulars with cold drinks and hot food. Situated next to his uncle's Esso station, it was a reliably good place where people could go to rub elbows with their neighbors. Built from cinderblocks and concrete, Landry's Café was one of the hardest buildings in the area, surviving the damages wrought by nearly ninety hurricane seasons.

“After Laura, though, there wasn't a cinderblock to be found there,” Landry marvels.

As James Doxey remarked, it hurts to lose your landmarks. But who's going to rebuild a restaurant when there's so few customers left to serve?

“I've talked to a lot of folks in Creole, some in Cameron too,” Landry says by telephone from his daughter's home in Lafayette. That's where he's living now. “There's probably not 25% of them that's committed to going back, as of now.”

Among those lifelong residents who are not returning are Alvin and Earline Mudd. Today, they are staying at a house in Singer, about 45 minutes from Lake



Charles. Earline was 12 years old when Hurricane Audrey lifted up her parents' home from its foundations, carrying it away atop the floodwaters, like an ark with her family inside.

"See, all the other storms we've passed through since 1957, we always had something to go back to," Earline explains. "Where we are, we're not going to have hardly any neighbors. So we just decided to stay here instead of going back and fighting everything again."

Asked if she thinks Cameron Parish

has a future, she replies flatly, "I don't see it, really."

In front of Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church is a tall white sculpture depicting the Virgin Mother with a protective arm around the figure of a frightened little girl. Her other hand is raised toward the Gulf in an arresting gesture; beneath it, inscribed in bronze, are the words "Do not harm my children."

The churches of Cameron Parish have always been the heart of commu-

nal life here. When Hurricane Audrey struck, residents fleeing the storm surge abandoned their cars and fled to Sacred Heart of Jesus church in Creole. The priest there gathered the refugees together and led them up to the choir loft where they waited in safety while, in the darkness below, the Gulf swept in through the church's broken walls and windows.

"This year, we were in the midst of celebrating our 130th anniversary at Sacred Heart of Jesus," explains Fr. D.B.

An illusion of normalcy: Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Cameron, Louisiana





People would return for Bingo Night at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church. The church kept the people who had moved away tethered to their community.

Thompson, who pastors both Star of the Sea and Sacred Heart. When he entered the sanctuary after Laura, his heart sank. “And I thought to myself, ‘My goodness, the church has been here so long! Could this be the blow that does it in?’”

Cameron’s churches provided the kinds of cultural services that Kinder Baumgarden described as necessary for keeping a community intact.

“There were certain events throughout the year that everybody was a part of,” Father Thompson explains. “For example, down at St. Eugene’s, they have their alligator festival every year to raise



money for the parish. Besides Holy Mass on Sundays, the church has been part of the fabric of daily life for people here.”

Fr. Thompson makes special mention of the big bingo events at Our Lady Star of the Sea. “You know, Catholics and bingo,” he jokes. “But, really, it was an opportunity for many who’d moved away after Rita to come back and reconnect with those who stayed.”

Most of the people left in Cameron have deep roots in the chenier plain, reaching down through generations of personal history. And when a family finally makes the hard choice to move away, those long roots still keep them tethered to the place, even at a distance. More often than not, leaving Cameron is something that happens gradually.

“You can look out on the crowd on any given Sunday,” says Fr. Thompson, “and there are always a number of families who don’t live here anymore, but they come back to go to Mass with the people they know and love, people who’ve been a part of the community for decades.”

In the days immediately after Laura destroyed Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron, a votive candle was found lit in a shadowy corner of the ruined sanctuary, like a prayer left behind. And when the candle would burn down, someone always showed up to light a new one. Who was tending the candle in the debris remained a mystery to Fr. Thompson. When he inspected the remnants of the church after Delta struck a few weeks later, it was still burning.

“It had been lit after Laura, but before Delta,” he said. “So that candle survived all through Delta and remained lit. To me, it was so poignant because it was a sign of somebody’s hope that survived

even through the second blast.”

But this candle has been burning much longer than that.

“I did it after Rita, and then after Ike, then after Laura” says Peter Posada. For the last fifteen years, every time the church has been destroyed by a hurricane, Posada has quietly slipped in through the wreckage and lit a candle. Why he does it is hard to say.

“I don’t like the church being dark,” he offers. “It’s just something I gotta do.”

Posada is one of those folks who no longer live in Cameron, but who never really left either. He owns a small marine service business called Cameron Cable and Cordage. His home was destroyed in Rita, but, with stringent new codes, rebuilding his house proved too costly. He stayed in a neighboring parish for a while before eventually settling into a small living space upstairs from his shop. Laura evicted him from there, so now he spends nights at his camp in Catahoula Parish. Every day except Sunday, he drives down to Cameron to look after his business—194 miles each way—because there’s nowhere for him to stay locally.

“All my family is buried over there,” he says gesturing toward the cemetery. “I’m the last one.”

Each time he makes the four-hour trip between Catahoula to Cameron, he stops by the church to tend to the candle. Ask him if he is thinking about leaving Cameron Parish and his answers become vague, equivocal.

“Ahhh, I don’t know—” he stammers, as though turning the question over in his mind for the thousandth time. Finally, he manages, “This is my home, you know. So I don’t know.” ■



For the last fifteen years, every time Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church has been destroyed by a hurricane, Peter Posada has quietly slipped in through the wreckage and lit a candle. “I did it after Rita, and then after Ike, then after Laura. I don’t like the church being dark.”



# Staging a comeback

**The River Center and Arts Council are investing \$20 million to have downtown ready for an arts resurgence in 2021**

BY JEFF ROEDEL

**W**ith every step clacking across the cool concrete quicker than the last, it is easy to see Renee Chatelain is elated. She should be. She's walking through walls. "I'm so excited, I haven't seen this yet," says the executive director of the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge, half whispery confession, half full-on belly laugh voice as she moves through the metal bones of her future office on the second floor of what will become the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center. "It's real—it's real," she repeats to herself.

Looking through an unfinished floor, past where stained-glass pieces by Paul Dufor and Steve Wilson will soon hang and up to the planned terrace space framed by a cut mosaic piece of big blue and grey autumn sky, Jonathan Grimes is just as impressed with the updates.

"I need to get the drone back out here," he tells Chatelain.

As the council's director of facilities, Grimes has been right beside Chatelain in overseeing the \$2.5 million construction surrounding them. Ritter Maher Architects is handling the design that will relocate the Arts Council from the Old Bogan Fire Station it has called home since the 1970s.

The renovation is turning this closed-in, mid-century modern district attorney's office—known as The Triangle—into a new 12,000-square-foot, three-story epicenter for cross-disciplinary artist workspaces and galleries, community meetings, public performances and social gatherings.

"This is a complementary building to the downtown theaters, as an affordable, accessible space where you can come in and actually create work—whether that's pottery or painting or dance or recording music," Chatelain explains. "And because it's open as a community arts center, the public can learn and experience art they wouldn't normally have this kind of easy access to."

Before the arts center opens its doors, the Raising Cane's River Center's 1970s-built, 2,000-seat theater venue will complete its own extravagant makeover for a late March grand reopening.

"If you provide places to seed new groups and creativity, there can be nothing better for a city to flourish," says Davis Rhorer, executive director of the Downtown Development District.

Together, these two dramatic projects represent nearly \$20 million in direct cultural investment, and along with the new library branch on North Boulevard, it's a culture rush unlike any downtown has seen since the Shaw Center for the

Arts arrived with its galleries, Manship Theatre, Tsunami and LSU Museum of Art almost 16 years ago.

"First and foremost, this theater renovation means the return of Broadway to Baton Rouge," says Les Crooks, regional general manager for ASM Global, the managing body for the River Center. "Broadway is imminent in Baton Rouge, and we'll be announcing details of that as soon as we can."

In addition to overdue electrical, air, sprinkler and lighting system updates, the new River Center Performing Arts Theatre will feature two elevators and a stunning 2,000-square-foot addition that includes new lobby space, restrooms, concessions and open-air spaces designed for hosting large pre-concert and privately held events.

The approach was to bend the rigid, Brutalist lines of the original structure with the nature-inspired flow and glass-gleaned light of modern design.

"The entire functionality of the space, from the aisles and concessions to the restrooms and elevators, is much improved," says architect Lisa Nice of Post Architects. "Our hope is that the community will embrace it and have an experience they will be proud of and take ownership of as a *Baton Rouge* experience. It'll help that they won't have to drive out of Baton Rouge for Broadway



BRIAN BALAMONTE

Renee Chatelain

and other world-class performances.”

Venue improvements include a new wood stage suitable for ballet performances, dance and cheer competitions; glass and railing renovations to the balcony; added VIP and box seating; larger, more comfortable seats; and restructured aisles for easier entry and exit.

“I don’t think this building has been significantly updated since it was built,” Crooks says. “If you wanted to get up and use the restroom during a perfor-

mance you really had to hustle before. Everything now will be much better tailored for the patron experience.”

It’s this kind of quality creative entertainment that venue owners know arts lovers are craving now more than ever.

“We’ve all realized there are things out of our control this year,” Chatelain says. “A tangible, palpable thing for us has been this building, so the new arts center is a hopeful thing, and we want it to continue to be that for the community.”

While 2020 was a difficult year for

live performance venues globally, Crooks sees plenty of light at the end of the pandemic tunnel.

“There’s an excitement to gather again in Baton Rouge, just as we’ve seen it with people across the country,” Crooks says. “People miss live entertainment right now. And soon, the River Center Theatre will be ready to deliver that.”

As venues plan for both pandemic and post-pandemic programming the question becomes how will downtown Baton Rouge attract patrons back with two



**IT'S BEEN VERY COLLABORATIVE. BUT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO HAVE BANNERS AND SIGNAGE TO MAKE A STRONG STATEMENT ABOUT OUR CREATIVE COMMUNITY."**

—Renee Chatelain,  
Baton Rouge Arts Council



new significant cultural pieces in place alongside the Louisiana Art & Science Museum, the Louisiana State Museum, the USS Kidd, and other arts attractions. A Downtown Arts & Entertainment District is on the books for Baton Rouge to receive grants, fellowships, tax breaks and education resources, but can this group of venues leverage that into a branded, experiential and widely publicized arts district?

"Absolutely that's something we need to revisit and to make sure the Arts Council's new space is included [it sits just outside of the Downtown Arts & Entertainment District as currently drawn]," Rhorer says. "Because that new arts center is a bold step. It's important for everyone to get behind it."

For the Louisiana Art & Science

Museum on River Road, the pandemic has meant a shift to a virtual gallery experience in record-time, including a new 360-degree video virtual tour of every exhibit, artifact and description housed in the museum expected to roll out in January.

"This is the perfect time now to prime the pump for 2021, and these new venues will continue to show downtown as this golden sweet spot of culture that can be used for economic development and tourism," says Serena Pandos, president and executive director for LASM.

Pandos says LASM's board, corporate and private sponsors, have remained supportive through the tough road of 2020, but hopes for more energy on the promotional side to bloom next year.

"Figuring out ways for people to find us and enjoy us even more will be essential," she says. Pandos envisions a shared online presence for downtown arts venues, as well as branded marketing penetration into local hotels, educational entities and wayfinding.

"All the downtown partners have been great, and it's been very collaborative," Chatelain says. "But it would be better to have banners and signage to make a strong statement about our creative community."

The Arts Council and the River Center share a vision with venues like LASM and Manship Theatre: that downtown becomes the city's premier place for quality live entertainment and home-grown creativity.

"This has always been a 'mission-driven' endeavor," says Scott Ritter of Ritter Maher Architects. "The Capital Region embraces its cultural diversity, and the Arts Council supports that mission, but without a 'home base,' a place where artists and creative consultants can collaborate and brainstorm and feel inspired, we really felt like opportunities for cultural elevation were being missed. By establishing the Cary Saurage Community Center for the

Arts, we now have a tangible, physical center for the cultural advancement."

Geographically, the Saurage Center is well positioned to impact multiple entities. It sits adjacent to an artistically rich, historically black neighborhood as well as Baton Rouge's oldest suburb, a stone's throw from Government Street—Baton Rouge's once and perhaps future cultural artery—near City Hall and the district courthouse a block away, and a short, tree-lined stroll from iconic structures like the Old State Capitol and the Old Governor's Mansion. From the arts center, one can be on the bridge looking down at the Mighty Mississippi in 30 seconds. And the Triangle's most acute north-facing point? It aims right at the State Capitol.

If this were a Hollywood movie, we'd do well to search for hidden treasure.

But for Chatelain there is already a bounty here, a potential. And just like the walls going up for her new office, that treasure to her is real, and it's going to be tangible soon.

"The new arts center allows us to pursue even more IDEAS—inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, sustainability," Chatelain says. "That's the core of our team and organization but also the core of what we want this building to be."

This potential the new arts center provides for connecting with disparate communities, students and artists within arm's reach of the Triangle and beyond.

"It's important to me that the Arts Council be seen as a community builder, and this new space will help people better understand the role we play in doing that," Chatelain says. "When the Arts Council began more than 40 years ago in the old fire station, it was very grassroots. Where we are standing now and what we can accomplish together for all people as a city is a real important next chapter." ■



## RIVER CENTER THEATRE FOR PERFORMING ARTS

**Location:** 275 S. River Road

**Opening:** March 2021

- \$17.9 million project
- 2,000 sq-ft addition
- Expanded lobby area and concessions area
- New and expanded restrooms
- Two new passenger elevators
- VIP boxes, VIP reception space, and balcony VIP seating
- New wider seating
- New wood stage and audio/visual systems
- New finishes—railings, flooring, counters, etc.—throughout
- New outdoor area and landscaping



## THE CARY SAUSAGE COMMUNITY ARTS CENTER

**Location:** 233 St. Ferdinand Street

**Opening:** July 2021

- \$2.5 million project
- 12,000 square feet, including a 1,200 sq-ft terrace
- Gallery and reception spaces
- Artist workspaces
- Audio recording studio
- Black box performance space
- Conference rooms and meeting spaces
- Arts Council offices



# *Giving* LESSON

The nation is watching Baton Rouge, where New Schools is recruiting and supporting the best charter schools. Philanthropists nationwide are investing in New Schools. They believe successes here could offer lessons for transforming schools across the nation.

Donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation were with New Schools from the beginning. They provided startup funding to give schoolchildren the opportunities they deserve.

If you want to pursue a cause or two you care about, you can do so by opening a donor advised fund at the Foundation. Our Elizabeth Hutchison at (225) 387-6126 and [ehutchison@braf.org](mailto:ehutchison@braf.org) is available to guide you.

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*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*

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# Animal PRINTS

**Artist uses centuries old Japanese art form to document Louisiana's wild**

BY MAGGIE HEYN RICHARDSON | PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER

There were no cellphone cameras in 19th-century Japan. Fishermen, in need of a quick way to record impressive sea catches, turned to art. But it wasn't painting or sketching. Seconds after hauling in a prized species, they would coat the fish in washable ink and lay a thin sheet of rice paper on top. Then they'd rub their hands over the paper to gently find the fish's contours, transferring its image. The fish was then washed clean, and either released back into the water or sold at market. The angler was left with a detailed rendering of the creature and tangible proof of his fishing acumen.

The process of *gyotaku*, translated as "fish rubbing," took off, becoming a recognized artform in Japan in the 1800s. Many fishermen added color to their prints, along with more detail around the fishes' eyes. Prints were

sometimes brought to royal court. Gyotaku would later fade in popularity, but recently, it has experienced a resurgence of sorts among some American artists.

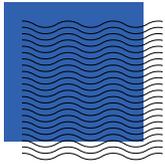
One is Louisiana painter Leslie Charleville. Discovering gyotaku was the perfect collision of two of her chief interests, fine art and the outdoors. The Rosedale native grew up in a family of avid hunters and fishers, their playground the wild terrain surrounding the Atchafalaya Swamp. She graduated with degrees in both art history and fine art from LSU, but it wasn't until 2012 when her sister was watching a television fishing program that featured a short segment on gyotaku that she had even heard of the artform.

"I did some research on it and I just fell in love with the process," says Charleville, who also works at the Louisiana Art & Science Museum as a special events planner. "I was used to

Leslie Charleville, far right, uses gyotaku, a traditional Japanese technique, to make prints of wildlife that have been trapped or caught from a healthy population.







## FOUNDATION FACT

Leslie Charleville’s art is displayed on The Water Campus, a project of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation and Commercial Properties Realty Trust. When possible, the Foundation supports the work of Louisiana artists, purchasing their works and showing them in our buildings.

painting, but being able to document the real thing from nature was just amazing.”

Charleville began experimenting with rubbings on fish caught by friends and family. Through trial and error, she honed her process.

“My first prints were a disaster,” she says. “I was studying a lot of other artists and playing around with different techniques and I finally got comfortable with it.”

It’s harder than it looks, and a far cry from childhood leaf rubbings. Charleville often works dockside or on boats since she makes herself available to competitive anglers. Once, a 6:30 a.m. call had her traveling from Louisiana

to a marina on the Alabama Gulf Coast to document a 700-pound bluefin tuna, rare in the Gulf of Mexico. At the request of another fisherman, she stopped in Dulac on the way home to print a massive swordfish.

In the wild, the sun beats down and forces Charleville to work fast. She rolls a layer of water-based paint on the surface of the fish, and before it dries, covers it with a sheet of linen fabric. Keeping the fabric neatly in place, she carefully presses down, touching each fin, gill and scale to ensure every detail is transferred.

“Before I started printing, I thought I knew what a fish looked like, coming from a fishing family,” Charleville says.

“But this has taught me to see things in a whole new way. There is such incredible detail in each species.”

Fish are the classic subject of *gyotaku*, and Charleville reckons she has documented more than 100 different freshwater and saltwater species. But she hasn’t stopped there. She’s also printed cephalopods, crustaceans, reptiles, birds and even feathers. What’s especially captivated her, though, is applying the technique to the American Alligator. Charleville’s framed alligator prints have become wildly popular, boosting her profile as a regional artist.

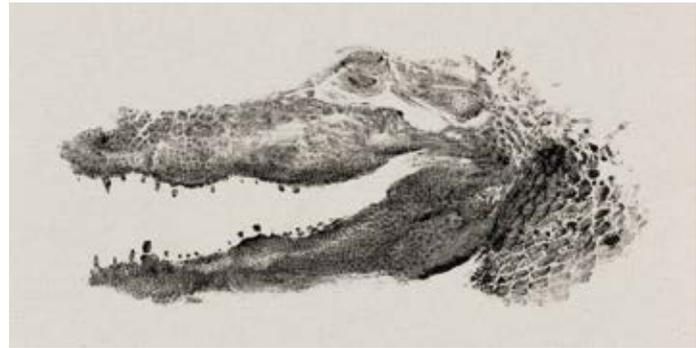
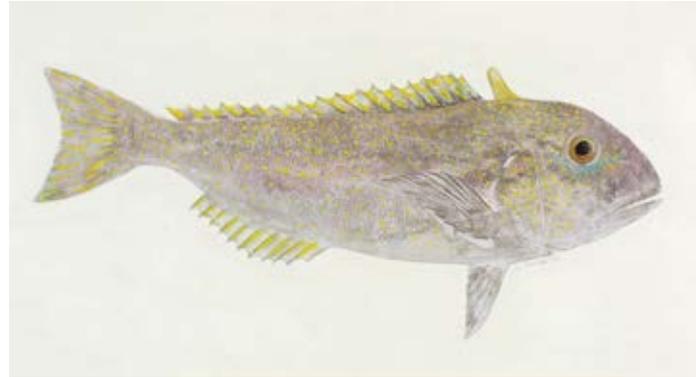
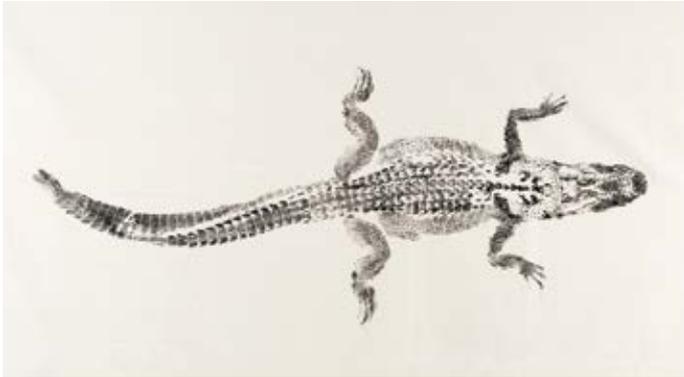
“People really love the alligators, because they’re just quintessential Louisiana,” she says.

Once threatened in the United States, Louisiana’s alligator population has been healthy for decades thanks to a strategic wildlife management program introduced in the early 70s. Alligators are legally harvested each September under heavy regulations and only by licensed hunters. Nuisance animals are managed throughout the year by officials from the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

During alligator season, hunters arrange for Charleville to accompany them on expeditions into the marsh so that she can print their prizes before the animals are processed for their hides and meat.

Leslie Charleville rubs a washable ink into the contours of an alligator. In Japan, fish are washed off and released or sold at market.





Artist Leslie Charleville's prints have become popular, with the quintessential Louisiana alligator the most desired.

Charleville says her approach to each creature she prints – whether it's a three-foot octopus, an oyster still in its shell, or a Red Snapper, takes on a life of its own. But working with an alligator, she adds, is especially compelling.

"There is so much detail," she says. "When you have a chance to observe one this closely, and touch it, you notice all sorts of things, like how soft the skin is and how the patterns differ."

Charleville starts by laying the animal flat in a kind of gentle repose. She pours out bright blue water-based paint in a tray, and rolls it onto a small clean paint roller. Starting at the alligator's head, she follows the skin's contours, inking each nook and cranny as she works her way down the neck, appendages, body and one side of the tail (both sides would create a butterfly effect in the image).

With a partner, she takes a sheet of linen from the stack she's cut nearby, and lays it across the creature. Charleville presses down tenderly, picking up the crevasses, spikes and scales, large and small. She pulls the linen off and inspects the work. Sometimes it takes two to three pulls to get it right.

When she's satisfied, the alligator is washed clean with a nearby hose if one is handy, or sometimes in the marsh.

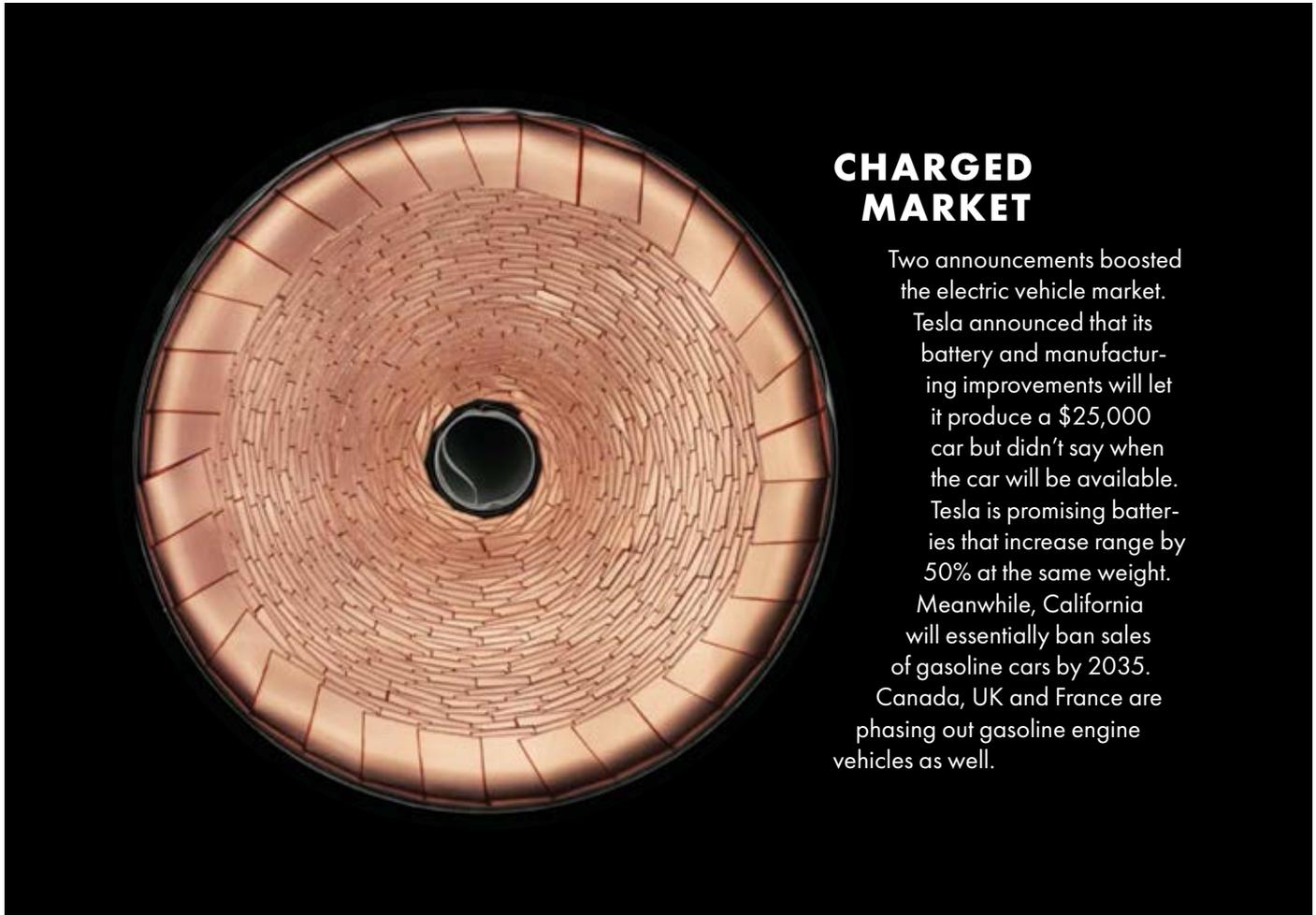
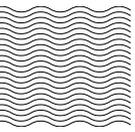
Charleville sees her work as contemplative, a kind of meditation on nature. She likes the idea that gyo-taku records the existence of an animal whose physical presence is about to be erased.

"You can harvest an animal—hunting is an important part of our culture," she says. "But then they're consumed, and they're gone. This is a way to honor them." ■



**"I was used to painting but being able to document the real thing from nature was just amazing."**

—Leslie Charleville



## CHARGED MARKET

Two announcements boosted the electric vehicle market. Tesla announced that its battery and manufacturing improvements will let it produce a \$25,000 car but didn't say when the car will be available. Tesla is promising batteries that increase range by 50% at the same weight. Meanwhile, California will essentially ban sales of gasoline cars by 2035. Canada, UK and France are phasing out gasoline engine vehicles as well.

## IT'S THE HUMIDITY

An analysis by ProPublica and *The New York Times* says that places like Baton Rouge will become less and less habitable as the planet heats up and becomes more humid. Under a moderate carbon emissions scenario, much of the southeast U.S. becomes less livable, with the habitable area shifting to the Midwest and Canada by 2070. By then, perhaps earlier, the Baton Rouge region will experience up to 70 "wet bulb" days per year, when it's too hot and humid for the body to regulate itself by sweating.

NUMBER >

52

# -29%



**Reduction in East Baton Rouge traffic** to workplaces during a period in late September and October, compared to a six-week pre-pandemic baseline in January and February. Enough people in the parish continue to work away from the office to solve—at least temporarily—the traffic problem.

SOURCE: GOOGLE MOBILITY



## PANDEMIC

The pandemic has opened a new avenue to reduce opioid addictions and related deaths. Under relaxed federal rules, millions who live in rural areas have access to Suboxone by mail. The drug blocks opioid cravings and prevents withdrawal symptoms. People who live near clinics can also get the drug by mail. "Home treatment lessens the shame for me," one man taking the medicine told *The New York Times*. "I don't have to worry what doctors around here think."

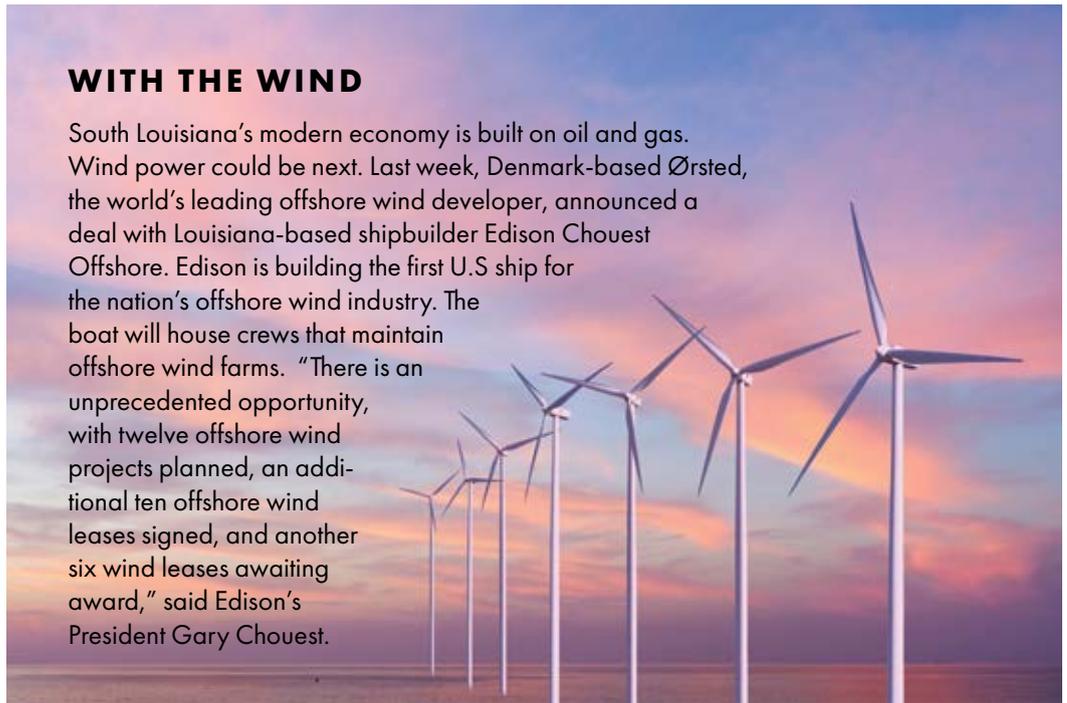


## TASTING SIGHT

A breakthrough device lets blind people use their tongues to "see." BrainPort's Vision Pro camera converts images into electrical signals that prickle a tongue pad. Users feel moving bubble-like patterns on their tongues that they learn to interpret as the shape, size, location and motion of objects in their environment. Another BrainPort device helps people improve their balance and gait.

## WITH THE WIND

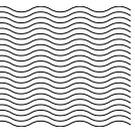
South Louisiana's modern economy is built on oil and gas. Wind power could be next. Last week, Denmark-based Ørsted, the world's leading offshore wind developer, announced a deal with Louisiana-based shipbuilder Edison Chouest Offshore. Edison is building the first U.S ship for the nation's offshore wind industry. The boat will house crews that maintain offshore wind farms. "There is an unprecedented opportunity, with twelve offshore wind projects planned, an additional ten offshore wind leases signed, and another six wind leases awaiting award," said Edison's President Gary Chouest.



## TECH AROUND THE CORNER?

Research proves that compact nuclear fusion is possible. Scientists with Commonwealth Fusion Systems and MIT, which are jointly developing a reactor that mimics how the sun produces energy, say they will have a working model based on their experiments in three to four years and a commercial reactor in a decade. If the partners do prove their technology, all other forms of energy production would likely disappear over time. Commercial fusion power would be clean, abundant and cheap.





TIM MUELLER

## THE (ONLY) REAL THING

The electric Coca-Cola sign in downtown is the last real thing of its kind. There were believed to be only two such billboards left. The other, in San Francisco, was dismantled in October; Coca-Cola there didn't want to pay higher lease costs. It had blinked 112 feet in the air over the highway since the 1930s.

Our sign will continue to pulse with neon. That's because the Baton Rouge Area Foundation took control of the billboard on Third and Florida streets in 2016 and received pledges from Entergy and Baton Rouge Coca-Cola Bottling for upkeep and power. The sign first flickered into life in 1951, above the Liggett Drug Store, the largest self-serve store of its kind in the South. Its lights now signal a revival of Third Street and our downtown.



## *A holiday gift for Foundation members.*

We are offering free copies of *Coastal Sketches*, writer C.E. Richard's personal journey across coastal parishes of Louisiana. He tells of people who have long adapted to the ground shifting beneath their feet, while sharing the history of Louisiana's waterside communities: The mystery of the Manilamen of Saint Malo, Jean Lafitte and his marauding pirates, the legend of a giant and venomous snake that carved out Bayou Teche.

**Members wanting a copy of the book, which was published by the Foundation, can send their names and addresses to [mverma@braf.org](mailto:mverma@braf.org).**

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# TOMORROW IS BUILT BY WHAT WE DO TODAY

Lemoine is proud to partner with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation in a shared vision to improve the community where we live and work. Together, we are all constructors of our community, builders of our future.



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