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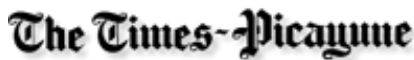


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Grant will help protect forest

Thursday, April 22, 2004

By Jean Perret
Contributing writer

With wings spread wide, a hungry osprey slowly glided downward, the bottomland hardwood forest its goal.

The forest, stretching between Lower Coast Algiers and Belle Chasse, offers a diverse collection of tree species, including gum, oak and cypress, as well as swampy ponds that host fish, plants and wildlife. It also is the first stop for feasting migrating birds on their journey south or when they are homeward bound after a long winter hiatus.

For several years, an effort has been under way to protect this forest of approximately 10,000 acres from development, and the movement recently got a boost, thanks to a \$5,000 grant from Chevron Texaco Co., the project's first corporate sponsor.

Lower Coast Algiers resident Katie Brasted, president of the Woodlands Trail and Park Inc. nonprofit organization, wants to build 19 miles of trails across Lower Coast Algiers and northern Belle Chasse for running, biking, walking, horseback riding, birding and in-line skating.

The Plaquemines Parish Council recently approved an 80-foot right of way for public access to proposed Woodlands Trails and Park.

The council also voted to pursue a historic designation for 10 World War II-era bunkers, which are also located inside the tract.

Last week, the volunteers advocating for the park held a celebration for the grant from Chevron Texaco at the entrance to the land, located on F. Edward Hebert Boulevard, across from Cypress Park.

Michael H. Burnside, Americas regional manager for the Chevron Oronite Co., presented the check to Bradsted and Plaquemines Parish President Benny Roussele, one of the organization's directors.

Oak Point's contribution will be used to support the establishment of the 6.82-

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mile Louisiana Great Gulf Coast Birding Trail within the Woodlands tract.

Burnside stressed the importance of Chevron's efforts and commitment to maintaining the balance between development and green acreage.

Several partners in the project were on hand to celebrate the event, including Nathan Champagne of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative and New Orleans Mayor's Office of Environmental Affairs; Doug Daigle of the Mississippi River Basin Alliance; Bill Keller of the Mississippi River Trail; Stacye Palmer of the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, Conservation and Assistance Program; and Karen Parsons, senior transportation planner with the Regional Planning Commission.

When completed, nature lovers will be able to enjoy the beauty nature has created, Brasted said. Hikers also will be able to enjoy a little local history along the way as the path wanders in front of the Stanton sugar mill and plantation, the World War II bunkers, Fort St. Leon and other historical locations on the land.

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