

New Orleans

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Newsbeat

By [Ian McNulty](#)

Trailblazing on the West Bank

An initiative to create a 19-mile network of recreational trails connecting natural resources and historic sites in a wooded area of the West Bank is gaining ground.

The Woodlands Trail and Park project has been in the works for several years, promoted by a group of private citizens and public officials, but it has recently been attracting grant money to move its plans forward. The group wants to establish the trail network in the Lower Coast Algiers/Belle Chasse area as a large loop following the Mississippi River and Intercoastal Canal. The trails could be used for activities such as jogging, hiking, bicycling and birdwatching, with an adjacent trail for horseback riding.

Woodlands Trail board president Katie Brasted says the idea is to protect the area's natural resources and make them accessible for low-impact recreation before further development creeps in.

"A lot of taxpayer money gets spent because we didn't (plan) smart growth from the beginning," she says. "It's much less expensive to do things right the first time." The trails would connect features in the area, including the ruins of a sugar mill and colonial-era riverfront fort, old-growth bottomland forests and the river levee. The trail system would also connect a series of ammunition bunkers built around World War II when the Navy operated a large installation in the area. Brasted and others on her board are now collecting information about the history of the bunkers from veterans around the country.

The group recently received a trail grant from Congress for \$33,000 to pay for an environmental assessment of the project. The study will be undertaken by the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission, an inter-parish government agency. The Woodlands Trail project has been approved for a further \$70,000 in grant money from the state and \$30,000 from the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program pending results of the study. —Ian McNulty

City cozies to
South African port

A budding relationship between New Orleans and the South African port city of Durban took another step forward late in 2003 as the two cities signed an agreement to work toward a trading and cultural partnership.

Located on the Indian Ocean, Durban is the largest port in the southern hemisphere and the entry point for more than 60

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percent of South Africa's container shipping. About 2.5 million people live in its metro area, which is also home to one of South Africa's three major international airports and a continental ground transportation network.

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and Durban city manager Michael Sutcliffe signed the agreement at a business forum organized by the New Orleans/South African Connection, a local nonprofit group that has promoted such events annually since 1999. Organization president Damon Batiste says there's great potential for international trade, tourism and cultural exchange between New Orleans and South Africa. Durban's port makes the city a logical starting point, he says.

"It's the Big Easy of Africa," says Batiste. "They have rich traditions of hospitality and food and music that they recognize here too, and we can build that into business (relationships), especially with their port.

"We have a chance for New Orleans to be the gateway to South Africa," he says. In addition to organizing the annual business forum, Batiste has worked to introduce South Africa to event planners in New Orleans and hosted concerts and other events in both countries. A major validation of that cultural diplomacy came in November when the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival selected South Africa as the theme of its cultural showcase for 2004. More than 100 South African musicians and craftsmen have been invited to participate in the festival.

The agreement signed by Nagin and Durban's manager signals their intent to develop a more formal business and cultural partnership, which is expected to be presented this year. -I.M.

Port Pelican plans to import natural GAS

Federal regulators have given energy giant ChevronTexaco Corp. permission to build a port off the coast of Louisiana designed specifically to import foreign natural gas. The port will be the first of its kind in the world.

Called Port Pelican, the \$800-million facility would handle natural gas that has been liquefied for shipping from producing countries to the United States, where it will be used to fuel electric power plants, heat homes and make chemical products. ChevronTexaco says it will begin construction in 2004. The company expects Port Pelican to be completed in 2007.

In its natural form, gas is difficult to ship over long distances. But when brought down to super-cold temperatures, the fuel becomes a liquid that can then be shipped around the world in tankers. ChevronTexaco's planned offshore port would be a receiving point for the fuel, where it would then be returned to a gas and distributed to users nationwide through a pipeline network.

Shell Oil and New Orleans-based McMoRan Exploration Co. are also planning similar projects of their own, though they are still awaiting approval from regulators.

Port Pelican will be the first deepwater port built in the United States since the 1976 Louisiana Offshore Oil Port.

ChevronTexaco also plans to build a similar liquefied natural gas port in Mexico. -I.M.



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