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### PRESERVING THE PAST

Holy Cross joins Algiers trail project

Thursday, December 30, 2004

By Aaron Wilkinson Contributing writer

Our Lady of Holy Cross College is jumping on board with organizers of the proposed Woodlands Trail and Park project in Lower Coast Algiers to help make their vision a reality.

Under the new partnership, students and instructors from Holy Cross will help collect oral histories from veterans who serviced the many ammunition bunkers dotting the trail's route along about 5,000 acres in Orleans and Plaquemines parishes that once belonged to the Navy. The bunkers, which were used in World War II and the Korean War, figure prominently in the physical and cultural landscape of the project, which will include 19 miles of trails across Lower Coast and northern Belle Chasse for running, biking, walking, horseback riding, birding and in-line skating.

Katie Brasted, a Lower Coast resident and visionary behind the trail, met with Holy Cross administrators after learning of efforts there to develop expertise in collecting oral histories.

"It was amazing," she said. "I explained the entire project and concept, and they were very excited. We could see lots of ways we could work together to share the expertise of the professors there and to help with this community project."

After leading a group of students and instructors from Holy Cross' history department on a tour of the bunkers, Brasted worked with administrators to arrange a visit from Jennifer Abraham of Louisiana State University's T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History.

Abraham led an October workshop at the college detailing interviewing techniques and equipment specifications for gathering oral histories of the quality required for indexing with the Library of Congress, whose veterans history project department helped finance her visit. Abraham also has signed on to help file the recordings collected by Holy Cross students at her center and the Library of Congress, Brasted said.

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"This certainly lends credibility to our efforts and should help us with future funding requests," Brasted said. "The more partnerships you develop, the more broad-based the project becomes. It really opens up lots of possibilities."

Students are scheduled to begin collecting histories in mid-January, Brasted said. She hopes to incorporate some of their findings in information kiosks posted along the trail and to make them accessible to visitors at an interpretive center she envisions for the trailhead. In the meantime, the partnership will give students invaluable hands-on experience, and lend support to trail supporters' efforts to move the project forward, including establishing the bunkers as a National Historic Site.

"This is living history," she said. "It gives students an opportunity to work outside of the classroom, and will help us continue to discover the history of the area."

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