



# The Plaquemines GAZETTE

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## Plaquemines Port Begins to Operate Parish Ferries

By Justin Walton  
reporter@plaqueminesgazette.com

The Plaquemines Parish Port Harbor & Terminal District (PPHTD) has officially taken over ferry operations from the Plaquemines Parish Government (PPG), and with the ferries going through an extended period of atrophy—both the ferries' infrastructure and their ability to provide services—due to the financial crisis afflicting PPG, the port is looking at a long and expensive journey to improve the ferries.

"We understand that it's

going to be a challenge, but it's also something that we're looking forward to. We're going to run these ferries the right way," executive director of PPHTD Sandy Sanders stated. "Not everything is going to happen overnight, though. It'll take some time, but we'll improve the ferries systematically and with purpose."

According to the proposed 2022 PPHTD, taking on the ferries will give the port an approximately \$4.1 million additional strain on their expenses. The cost of the ferries—though expensive—is

ultimately able to be handled by the port. The main issue facing Sanders and PPHTD is the current state of ferry operations. Under staffing, dilapidated infrastructure, outdated mode of collecting fees, and ferries that frequently break down are now issues Sanders and the port must figure out how to remedy.

"With the understaffing issues, the biggest problem is the pay. I mean, the starting salaries we offer to work on these boats are so low, it's almost a surprise we have anyone working as a deckhand at

all," Sanders stated, explaining that he has already met with ferry staff to discuss what they and the ferries need. "So, in addition to working on raising salaries, we have a bunch of ideas as to how we're going to improve these ferries."

"It was sad to hear the woes of these guys [who work on the ferries]. They've had it tough. We're here to help them and try to improve the situation," he added.

Some of the ideas that are already being considered by

FERRIES – PAGE 2

## Corps of Engineers to Spend \$783 Million for Levee Improvements

By Justin Walton  
reporter@plaqueminesgazette.com

A Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority press release—published on January 19—outlining \$2.6 Billion in funding for United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) projects in Louisiana featured a massive apportionment of money for Plaquemines Parish levees.

Specifically, \$783 million—the largest portion of the \$2.6 billion dedicated to one project—will be set aside for the "New Orleans to Venice Hurricane Protection Project." According to Plaquemines Parish President Kirk Lepine, this will be used to fund the improvement of levees south of Belle Chasse on the West Bank by upgrading existing "25-year levees" to "50-year levees."

After Hurricane Katrina decimated southeastern Louisiana in 2005, the federal government and USACE went on a campaign to improve the area's levees. This resulted in the creation of the federal levee system (which provides "100-year storm" protection) for Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and part of Plaquemines. However, that federal, "100-year storm" levee only covers Belle Chasse in Plaquemines; everything to the south is relying on much smaller levees for its storm protection.

"As I understand it, this money is going to be primarily for increasing the size of levees from 25-year protection to 50-year protection in the lower part of the parish," Lepine stated. "This is very exciting news for us, this is going to greatly benefit both of our residents and businesses in the area."

Director of the Plaquemines Parish Government Coastal Resources Department John Helmers, who has been helping the parish pursue this money, noted that it still hasn't been decided exactly how the \$783 million will be spent.

"We're really pushing for [USACE] to use some of that money to improve the Pointe Celeste Pump station. While having the increased flood protection from raising the levees is nice, it won't be effective if the pump station remains dilapidated," Helmers stated, explaining that the Point Celeste Project costs around \$40 million, which should be easily covered by the amount being allocated to Plaquemines. "If we get the pump station built up alongside the levees, we'll really be able to effectively clear that area after a storm. We won't lose access to the southern end for weeks like we did after Ida; it'll be great for everyone."

Helmers added that he was unsure if any of the money would find its way over to levee projects on the east bank. He

LEVEES – PAGE 2

## Plaquemines 4-H Club Hires New Assistant Ext. Agent for Their "Youth Development" Department

By Justin Walton  
reporter@plaqueminesgazette.com

The Plaquemines Parish 4-H Club recently brought on a new Assistant Extension Agent as the program seeks to reestablish itself in the community after the COVID-19 pandemic forced many of the group's events, meetings, and general operations to shut down for an extended period of time.

And the new hire, Derek Landrum, seems to be the perfect man for the job, bringing in a strong mix of experience and passion.

"We've been working really hard to get meetings back up and running. Our goal is to bring back all the programs we provided to children in the parish. Things stagnated

LANDRUM – PAGE 2

## 649 Acres of Wetlands in Belle Chasse Officially Set Aside as "Green Space"

By Justin Walton  
reporter@plaqueminesgazette.com

The Plaquemines Parish Government has officially sold 649.11 acres of "the forested wetland property known as Woodlands Preserve" to the Woodlands Conservancy so the property is "permanently protected" from development and preserved as a green space for foreseeable—perhaps permanent—future.

The sale was announced via a Woodlands Conservancy press release published on January 18. The Plaquemines Parish Government will receive about \$3.2 million from the sale, and a spot in the parish that will maintain its natural

WOODLANDS – PAGE 2



From left, Woodlands Conservancy Founding Board Members, Councilman Benny Rousselle and Executive Director Katie Brasted, stand alongside Lee Dupont, Land Chair and Vice President of Woodlands Conservancy. The group is showing a check for \$3.25 million that funded the land acquisition – a result of over two decades of work to preserve the 649-acre forested wetland.

# Excellence Shines Bright in Plaquemines Parish Schools

STUDENT OF THE YEAR



**Chloe Venable**  
5th Grade  
Belle Chasse Middle School

STUDENT OF THE YEAR



**Brooke Shelton**  
8th Grade  
Belle Chasse Middle School

STUDENT OF THE YEAR



**Irina Layne**  
12th Grade  
Phoenix High School

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR



**Chervonder Frederick-Encalade**  
Phoenix High School

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR



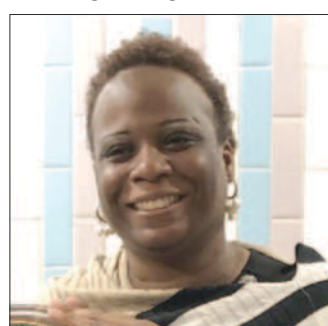
**Lisa Heck**  
Belle Chasse Middle School

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR



**Dalon Bienemy**  
Phoenix High School

PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR



**Dr. Stacey-Ann Barrett**  
South Plaquemines Elementary School

On January 10, the Plaquemines Parish School Board honored the winners of the district's Students of the Year, Teachers of the Year, and Principal of the Year for the 2021-2022 school year. Each winner was presented with a trophy or plaque at its monthly meeting.

SCHOOLS – PAGE 3



Members of National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa Inc., Alpha Theta Chapter joined in the celebration of chapter member Dr. Stacey-Ann Barrett being named Plaquemines Parish 2022 Principal of the Year. Pictured, from left: Chapter member Maria M. Prout, Dr. Barrett, Chapter member Barbara B. Brown and Chapter president Sharron Parker.



# EDITORIAL

## Thoughts from the Publisher Redistricting is a Dull but Far-reaching Topic

By Dale Benoit

Three redistricting meetings have been completed and a few folks have a better understanding of the process and the task ahead for the parish council and school board. I say a few folks, because the meetings were sparsely attended. I skipped them myself but I did watch the recorded versions of all three.

Attorney Dannie Garrett explained the process and presented a draft of possible district lines based on input from council members. Garrett did a good job of distilling very complicated subject matter so that citizens with an interest could understand the process and the laws governing redistricting. That's not to say everyone liked what was presented.

Two main factors are driving the significant changes in district lines. The parish as a whole is 15 percent smaller than in the 2000 census dropping from 27,000 to 23,000 in population. And the upper Westbank has grown exponentially while the southern and eastern regions have lost population. We can throw out the 2010 census from a comparison standpoint because that plan was adopted not really knowing how the repopulation following Hurricane Katrina was going to occur and some broad deviations from the ideal numbers were allowed.

Comparing the 2020 population to what was adopted following the 2000 census, the Eastbank was most affected dropping from 3,025 residents to 1,422. In 2000, District 2 was and remains the largest, increasing from 3,126 to 3,325 residents. If you apply the one-person, one-vote rule, that means

the District 1 council member has more than twice the voting power of the District 2 council member.

Garrett explained that while the ideal district population by the 2020 census count is 2561, council and school board members can approve districts which range from 5 percent above or below that ideal number. At the Belle Chasse hearing, District 2 council member Beau Black pointed out that the districts as shown in the draft maps would keep things out of balance as Belle Chasse districts are drawn to include more than the ideal number while southern districts are drawn with smaller than ideal numbers. Anticipated building permits and population trends indicate Belle Chasse will continue to grow, while other regions are likely to decline in numbers. So we should be making southern districts larger by population count and Belle Chasse districts smaller to allow for growth to keep districts more uniform in population counts.

Eastbank residents who attended the Pointe a la Hache hearing were told their district would have to include some Westbank residents to meet the population requirements. It was not welcomed news to folks from a region known to assert their independence.

An interesting observation from Garrett was that this reapportionment will decide election districts for the next three cycles... 2022, 2026 and 2030, as the 2030 census will not be complete in time for elections that year. That's a greater reason that our elected officials get this right.

The council has until May to adopt its new district lines while the school board has until June.

## LEVEES

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

noted that the money could "potentially" be used for the east bank, but nothing has been decided yet.

"I'd just like to thank our senators, our representatives, the administration, and the port, everyone really stepped up to make sure we got this funding," Helmers stated. "The fact is that this levee upgrade and, hopefully, pump station improvement are things we desperately need. With them implemented, we'd be able to protect all the economic development, the highway, and the residents."

Vice President and General Counsel of the Venice Port Complex George Pivach was also "very pleased" to hear that Plaquemines levees were about to receive improvement. Pivach explained that he and the Venice Port Complex have been major advocates for this type of funding for years as improving the levees outside of Belle Chasse doesn't just help the residents, it helps businesses as well.

"Raising the levees is absolutely key to protecting [Louisiana Highway 23] from tropical events. That's been a big problem for us in the past, having the highway flood after [many] tropical events isn't good for businesses," Pivach stated. "This puts a smile on my face, but I think it's important to keep in mind that this is an ongoing effort. We have to make sure, once they're built, that the levees are maintained and kept in good condition."

"This is going to protect the economic development that will be the driving force of Plaquemines' recovery. This is for our future. Residents, businesses, the port, the government, everyone needs these levee improvements," he added.

In the CPRA press release, there was an additional \$8 million for the Upper Barataria Basin, but neither Lepine nor Helmers knew if that was going to be used for the Plaquemines or Jefferson Parish portion.

## FERRIES

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Sanders and the port are to provide the deckhands with uniforms, not allow people to pay the toll with change, eventually morph toll payments into a prepaid ticketing system, and to repair/improve the ferry landings.

"For now, we're going to run the ferries the best we can within our budget while also seeing how we can implement some of the necessary fixes," Sanders stated. "It won't be an instant fix, but we're going to actively work on fixing the major problems of these ferries. We're going to bring these ferries into the 21st century. The people of this parish deserve that, at least."

Prior to the turnover, PPG tried to remedy these problems many times. The council had included more money in the ferry budget in an attempt to hire more deckhands so the ferries could better service Plaquemines' working residents. Even so, PPG had been unable to expand the ferry staff.

With the port being in a much more stable financial situation than PPG, Sanders and PPHD commissioners will be looking to mend the staffing issue and many other issues affecting the ferries in 2022.

"The ferries have a lot of underlying problems, and fixing them is going to take some work," Sanders noted. "But it is an exciting prospect for us. We're finally going to have a way to really improve a service many in Plaquemines rely on."

# Fire Chief Robichaux inducted into 2021 Fire Chiefs Hall of Fame



On Jan. 12, the Louisiana First Responders Christian Faith Association inducted Fire Chief Roy A. Robichaux, Jr. of the Belle Chasse Volunteer Fire Department into the 2021 Fire Chiefs Hall of Fame at the Heymann Performing Arts Center in Lafayette, LA. Chief Robichaux has dedicated 44 years as Chief and was recognized for his leadership activities in the state and community. In attendance was his son Jeff Robichaux and his wife Shara, wife Denise Robichaux, Assistant Chief Melvin Kiff and his wife Joyce and Deputy Chief Marty Martinez.



(Clockwise) Cathy Norman Pendland, Waltzer Wiygul & Garside LLC, Katie Brasted, Executive Director of Woodlands Conservancy, Lee Dupont, Land Chair and Vice president Woodlands Conservancy, President Kirk Lepine, Councilman Benny Rousselle, Parish Attorney, LV Cooley, Remy Donnelly, Jones Walker complete the signing of the legal documents that transferred property ownership from the Plaquemines Parish Government to Woodlands Conservancy.

## WOODLANDS

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

form while economic development advances throughout the rest of Plaquemines.

"Louisiana is losing land faster than just about anywhere else in the world. Over the past century nearly 2,000 square miles of coastal marshes and 80 percent of our forested wetlands have been lost," Executive Director of Woodlands Conservancy Katie Brasted said in the press release. "This property has particular conservation significance due to its unique location situated between the New Orleans Metropolitan Area and the Gulf of Mexico."

It should be noted that the Woodlands Conservancy is not actually providing the money to pay for the land. The funds are coming from American Commercial Barge Line LLC as part of a settlement from a judgement leveled against them for an oil spill in the Mississippi River near Gretna, LA that occurred on July 23, 2008.

District 5 council member Benny Rousselle—who has been steadily working to have this sale become a reality

since it was first thought of as a possibility—stated that having this property dedicated as a "green space" owned by the Woodland Conservancy is a "win-win."

"With so much development going on, it's good that we can preserve this property for future generations," Rousselle stated. "And we get [around] \$3.2 million from it to give us some relief with our budget situation."

Rousselle added that while he thinks the money should be put into the "Emergency Fund," no decision on how the money will be used has not been made. An ordinance officially outlining where the funds will be placed in the budget has yet to be introduced.

"Our plan right now is to hold on to it and see where we are financially. We've just had to deal with debris removal contractors and [lots] of expenses related to Hurricane Ida clean up. So, we might have to spend it on that," parish president Kirk Lepine said. "That'll all get worked out with time. Right now, we're just excited to have this green space preserved. This is a great thing for our parish."

The Woodlands Preserve

is in district 2 council member Beau Black's district—who also played an active part in ensuring this land was preserved. Black echoed many of the sentiments around the sale as Lepine and Rousselle.

"Keeping this area in its existing state as a wetland is important; it provides us and [New Orleans] some extra hurricane protection, but it also lets our parish keep some of its natural look and serves as a good recreational area," Black stated. "It took quite a bit of time making sure everything was ready for the sale, but it's good we finally got this done; it's something everyone can appreciate."

Much like Lepine and Rousselle, Black wasn't sure how the money PPG is receiving from this sale will be used. Though he did offer his thoughts on how the money should be dedicated to most effectively benefit the parish.

"I'd like to see it split up between the nine council members and let them decide how their portion of the money is used in their district," Black stated. "I don't think it should just go into the general fund—money has a way of disappearing when it goes in there."

## LANDRUM

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we're starting to get things going again," Landrum stated. "The whole parish has faced a lot of adversity with COVID-19 and then Ida hitting the parish. But everything is starting to get back on track."

Landrum—who previously worked in the New Orleans 4-H Program from 2017 to 2021—explained they've been able to hold club meetings in multiple schools across Plaquemines and the club is now working on re-starting some of its "out of school" services.

"The school board and [superintendent Denis Rousselle] have been extremely helpful and active in helping us get back to hosting meetings for the kids, and, obviously, council members went above and beyond to provide

funding for our program despite budget issues," Landrum said. "The 4-H Club has a rich tradition in Plaquemines, I really think people value it here more than they do in other places. It's been great to be able to bring it back into the community."

While the switch to the Plaquemines 4-H position from New Orleans was sudden, Landrum—who grew up on the westbank—explained that he always had fond memories of Plaquemines from his childhood.

"Though I never lived in Plaquemines, I've gone fishing here my whole life. And I really grew fond of this parish; I was genuinely excited when I learned I'd be given the opportunity to work here," Landrum stated.

He explained that as the parish attempts to shake off the troubles it experienced in the past year and move forward into 2022, the 4-H Club



Derek Landrum

will be focused on getting back to being fully operational again.

"Our programs are starting to get back to where they were, and that's really exciting for us. We just want our [club members] to have as many opportunities to participate in the club as they can," Landrum added. "And if anyone wants to volunteer, please do. We can always use some extra help, even a little bit goes a long way."

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