

Shorts

News, notes and other mentionables

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Repairs to Southeastern Louisiana University's Turtle Cove Environmental Research Station are under way with \$4.8 million in federal funding.

Southeastern research site undergoing \$4.8M renovation

Southeastern Louisiana University began a \$4.8 million, four-phase renovation of its Turtle Cove Environmental Research Station, three and a half years after hurricanes Katrina and Rita battered the century-old building on Pass Manchac.

The building served as headquarters for the university's wetlands research and environmental education and outreach programs.

Turtle Cove Director Rob Moreau said the Federal Emergency Management Agency has committed to fund the project, which includes: \$3 million to replace bulkheads and docks; \$600,000 to replace

boardwalks leading to research sites in the Manchac Swamp; \$800,000 to repair and elevate the three-story main building; and \$400,000 to build a new elevated caretaker's building.

Leased to the university by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries since 1981, Turtle Cove has served as a research setting for Southeastern faculty and student scientists investigating wetlands ecology and restoration. The facility is located at the tip of the 8,300-acre Manchac Wildlife Management Area in northwestern St. John the Baptist Parish.

Economic data mixed for St. Tammany Parish

An economic report on St. Tammany Parish for 2008 shows some of the effects of the recession have trickled down to one of Louisiana's most affluent areas, but the area is still experiencing growth in employment and new businesses.

According to the St. Tammany Economic Development Foundation's quarterly economic trends report released in March, the number of employed workers in the parish grew 1.2 percent from October through December compared with the same quarter in 2007. The unemployment rate was 4 percent, below the state and national level.

For 2008, residential building permits fell 39.2 percent, and commercial permits fell 17.6 percent, as projects under construction before the tightening of the credit market were completed and fewer commercial projects were launched.

New business starts in the fourth quarter of 2008 were 3.7 percent higher than a year earlier, as 533 new businesses began operations. This was an improvement from third-quarter comparisons, which reflected the beginning of an anti-lending trend.

With 2,201 new business starts in 2008, there was a 2.9 percent decline from new businesses launched in 2007.

Marty Mayer installed as GNO Inc. chairman

Marty Mayer, president and CEO for Stirling Properties and ERA Stirling Properties in Mandeville, was installed as chairman of the Greater New Orleans Inc. board of directors for 2009-10.

Mayer has been involved with the organization for four years and has served on the GNO Inc. Regional Insurance Task Force as well as chairman-elect for 2008-09.

"My objective for 2009 is to enable GNO Inc. to be the catalyst for building bridges together, bringing together various groups, organizations and individuals who share a common vision and helping to lead such groups toward mutually shared goals," said Mayer. "We have already seen some tangible results, and I look forward to working with the organization and the board to building a prosperous future together for our region."

GNO Inc. promotes economic development by marketing the New Orleans region and improving regional business conditions through policy, work force and research initiatives.



Marty Mayer

Slidell court reports 'significant' increase in post-Katrina cases

Slidell City Court, which serves east St. Tammany Parish, has seen a significant increase in the number of cases filed post-Hurricane Katrina, most notably in traffic and adult misdemeanor crimes, and trends indicate the increase continues to grow, said Slidell City Court Judge James Lamz.

Compared with the number of cases filed in 2004, 2008 figures reveal the total number of cases filed are up 73 percent; civil cases filed are up 23 percent; criminal cases (adult misdemeanor, including DWI) are up 66 percent; and traffic cases are up 92 percent.

"The number of cases has trended up in nearly every category in the years since Katrina, when we saw such upheaval for our citizens," Lamz said.

Lamz said DWI cases alone jumped by 53 percent between 2007 and 2008, for which he cited aggressive law enforcement.

"The more we know the types of cases that are most impacting our communities, the better we are able to deploy our resources to be efficient in serving those who need us," Lamz said.

Although the total number of all cases filed in the court has increased, Lamz said the number of court personnel has increased by only 23 percent, from 13 to 16. To hear these cases on a timely basis without creating a backlog, the court has increased its disposal rate by a combination of increased bench time, streamlining paperwork and staff proficiency, Lamz said.

FEMA awards Slidell balance for drainage fix

The city of Slidell is claiming victory over the Federal Emergency Management Agency following a three-year battle over storm drainage cleanup costs.

After an initial request and two subsequent appeals for money to fix the Katrina-damaged system, the city received word that its final appeal was successful.

"Chalk one up for the forgotten city," Slidell Mayor Ben Morris said. "This has been a long and hard-fought battle, with many hours spent by my dedicated staff to reach this important point in our recovery."

Hurricane Katrina deposited large amounts of debris that severely damaged the city's storm drainage system. In January 2006, the city bid out the cleanup job and the engineering firm Montgomery Watson Harza was hired to repair the drainage system.

The city initially requested a \$5.37 million reimbursement from FEMA — the amount the city paid to clean the damaged system. Upon review of the request, FEMA determined the city used the wrong formula to determine the cost for work performed and ruled that the city's cost was unreasonable, approving \$3.13 million for the work.

The city appealed FEMA's decision.