

1012 Corridor Weekly

This Week's Headlines / Wed, Aug. 26, 2009

Hurricane Katrina redux week



Saturday marks four years since it happened. And since 2006, its anniversary has been celebrated, scorned and ignored. That's because Hurricane Katrina remains as much a part of south Louisiana's future as it does its past. This week saw two events of significance on the ground in New Orleans: the grand opening of the Langston Hughes Elementary School on Trafalgar Street, the first of the Recovery School District's "Quick Start" schools, and the groundbreaking for the new Lafitte Housing Development, where 1,500 homes and apartments will be built inside a planned community. Both are joint projects between the state and federal government, and the timing of each, four years after there was an immediate need for them, certainly offers up a subtext that can be interpreted differently by each and every person that was touched by the 2005 hurricane season. Even Gov. Bobby Jindal remarked Tuesday, while attending the school's opening, that it's great to see signs of recovery. But he also added that it's going to take a lot more work before Louisiana can truly leave the not-so-distant past — or at least its grip over current progress — where it belongs. In the meantime, we can just continue to shake off the three other major hurricanes that have knocked on our collective door since Katrina packed up and left. "This sort of spirit and attitude is embodied in many parts of our state as we have continued to recover from four storms in three years," Jindal says, "but there is no doubt that we need to see more of this teamwork at all levels of government as we continue to rebuild and recover from the effects of four hurricanes." — **Jeremy Alford**

Smart Growth Conference: It's also about what we eat



Among the traditional planning topics featured at this week's Smart Growth Summit in Baton Rouge is a hot social issue with growing traction: local food. "Educated eaters are coming your way," is the phrase we're living by right now," says speaker Copper Alvarez, executive director of the Baton Rouge Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance. On Thursday, Alvarez, along with Jeff Kleinpeter of Kleinpeter Farms and Vanessa Ulmer of the Tulane University Prevention Research Center, will discuss how better policies and planning can build an infrastructure that expands the availability of local food. "There's higher demand today than ever — the farmers routinely sell out," Alvarez says, "but only 4% of the population shops at farmers markets. The challenge of the future is creating sustainable, local food systems that can feed more people." While interest in local food has been building over the last two decades, it's now a mainstream topic with strong staying power, says Alvarez, helped by Michael Pollan's bestseller *In Defense of Food* and a new organic garden at the White House. The American Planning Association is also taking it seriously, with a cover story this month in its magazine *Planning* that explores how rising demand for locally grown goods will influence urban design. The Center for Planning Excellence

coordinates the Smart Growth Summit, which features speakers and workshops until Saturday. For more information, click [here](#). — **Maggie Heyn Richardson**

Corridor ACT scores remain largely flat

With a few notable exceptions, average ACT scores have shown little change along the corridor over the past five years. The latest report from the Louisiana Department of Education shows Orleans and St. James parishes made two of the biggest jumps in the state. Orleans jumped from 17.0 in 2005 to 19.1; St. James, 18.4 to 20.0. St. Tammany Parish boasts the highest average score in the state — 21.6 — which is above the national average of 21.1. Several corridor parishes are above the state average 20.1 but below the national average of 21.1. They include Ascension [20.3], Calcasieu [20.2], Jefferson Davis [20.2], Lafayette [20.7], Livingston [20.3], St. Charles [20.6], and the Zachary School District [20.3]. Overall, Louisiana's average score has climbed from 19.8 to 20.1 during the five-year period. The really good news is this: The percentage of Louisiana graduates who take the national assessment has risen dramatically, from 74% in 2006 to 89% in 2009. Louisiana ranked 43rd nationwide this year, but three ethnic groups outpaced the national average: African Americans, American Indians and Hispanics.

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In Livingston Parish, the doctors are [almost] in



If you become really sick in Livingston Parish, you have to leave — and seek medical care in Baton Rouge or Hammond. True, a few primary care clinics have opened in recent years. But for anything more serious than the flu or common cold, you have to travel east or west to see a specialist, undergo tests or have any type of surgical procedure. That situation, however, is about to change. Hammond-based North Oaks Health System already has broken ground on a 47,000-square-foot complex that will be located off Interstate 12 at the Satsuma exit in the central part of the parish and will give patients access to a variety of outpatient diagnostic and treatment services. Just four miles to the west, Baton Rouge-based Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, meanwhile, is planning an outpatient diagnostic facility and freestanding emergency room that will be located off I-12 at the Walker exit. To read the full story, click [here](#). — **Stephanie Riegel**

Louisiana: A tax-friendly place to retire?

Turns out Louisiana may be a pretty good place to retire. In its October issue, *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* magazine names it one of the most tax-friendly states for retirees. The story, "Retiree Tax Heavens [and Hells]," cites as one factor Louisiana's property taxes, which it says are the lowest in the nation. The state gives homeowners a \$75,000 homestead exemption and bases assessments on 10% of the fair market value. *Kiplinger's* also notes that Social Security benefits and military, civil-service and state- and local-government pensions are exempt from state income taxes. Private pensions and out-of-state government pensions for retirees 65 and older are also exempt. On the downside for retirees: *Kiplinger's* puts Louisiana among the five states with the highest overall sales taxes, along with California, Washington, Illinois and Tennessee. State sales tax is 4%, but local parishes and jurisdictions levy their own that can bring the total to 10.75%.

Covington's West 30 neighborhood gets a master plan



The Northshore Community Foundation will provide up to \$150,000 for a master plan for the West 30s neighborhood in Covington, an area adjacent to the city's successful downtown. Last week, the foundation and the community group Friends of the West 30s chose Nashville-based Walker Collaborative to lead the planning process from an original list of 23 state and national firms. West 30s has long been dominated by unemployment, crime and blight and has been largely unaffected by the post-Katrina economic boom felt throughout the Northshore, says Foundation Director of Community Development Frank Saxton. However, its advantageous location between picturesque downtown and retail-rich Collins Boulevard gives the neighborhood rich potential. "It's got a lot of things going for it. It's on a grid, it's walkable and it couldn't be better situated," Saxton says. Support comes from the foundation's Hurricane Katrina Planning Assistance grants, which fund community development projects in St. Tammany, St. Helena, Tangipahoa and Washington parishes. Grants usually call for a match, but this time, Saxton says, the foundation will foot the bill for the year-long plan. "The concerns were so large, and we felt it was so important, that we wanted to put our name behind it," he says. "We think it will become a sales piece, and will help unlock other sources of funding down the road." — **Maggie Heyn Richardson**

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Brad Pitt campaign running strong



Brad Pitt

The Brad Pitt for Mayor campaign in New Orleans is running strong — even if the actor can't actually star on the ballot. A Brad Pitt for Mayor Rally is planned for 5 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 2, at the Louisiana Film Museum at The Riverwalk. Fans are encouraged to dress as their favorite Brad Pitt character from one of the films he made in New Orleans. The rally is just the latest happening in the mythical campaign. Storyville has been selling \$20 "Brad Pitt for Mayor" t-shirts for months, donating \$2 from every sale to Pitt's Make It Right Foundation, which is rebuilding homes in the Lower Ninth Ward using environmentally sustainable designs. So far, Storyville has sent the charity \$2,378, which translates into 1,189 sales, mathematically netting Storyville about \$19,000. There's also an online petition encouraging the actor to run, with 691 signatures; a Brad Pitt for Mayor Facebook page with 6,026 fans; and a Brad Pitt for Mayor Campaign Steering Committee, founded by Dr. Thomas Bayer of Tulane University. Nonetheless, residency requirements rule out a Pitt candidacy. He and his partner, Angelina Jolie, bought a home in the Crescent City in 2007. But to be eligible, candidates must be residents for at least five years before the date of the election. The mayoral primary is Feb. 6. In an interview on the Today Show earlier this month, he insisted his political platform would likely prove a major liability. "Yeah. I'm running on the gay marriage, no religion, legalization and taxation of marijuana platform," Pitt told interviewer Ann Curry. "I don't have a chance." When Curry pressed Pitt on whether he would actually want the job, Pitt said, "I don't have a chance, no. It's not what I do best." — **Penny Font**

Northshore hosts first U.S. Q50 Races Ultramarathon



The Northshore will be the first U.S. site to host the Q50 Races Ultramarathon, an international event that combines serious running and scenic venues. The event is set for Oct. 18, with runners tackling a picturesque 50k on- and off-road course that takes them through three different ecosystems as well as through the streets of quaint Old Mandeville. Previous Q50 races have been held in Mexico, Italy, Costa Rica and Patagonia. "We are very excited to be bringing the Q50 to the U.S.A. for the first time," says race founder Cesar Torres, who sees the eco-friendly Q50 as a way for runners to combine their love of running and respect for nature. "The race gives runners an opportunity to experience amazing places, learn about other cultures and do what they enjoy most — run." Runners will wind through Fontainebleau State Park, Northlake Nature Center along Bayou Castine, as well as on the Tammany Trace, through Old Mandeville and along the Mandeville lakefront. The Q50 Ultra events are part of the Greater New Orleans Northshore Full Adventure Weekend, with events a day earlier open to all ages and skill levels. Proceeds from the Q50 will go toward childhood obesity awareness. For more information, click [here](#).

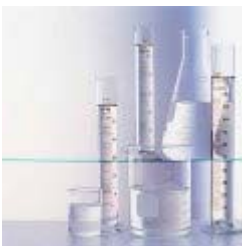
Entrepreneur Challenge on the hunt for crazy ideas

Got a crazy idea? Consider entering The Idea Village Entrepreneur Challenge 2010. All New Orleans-based start-up wanna-bes are invited to apply through a competitive process; winners will be chosen in October. The 25 entrepreneurs with the best laid plans will be invited to partner with The Idea Village's crack team of experts to identify and execute key growth opportunities in 2010. What's in it for you? All of this: Business strategy and consulting services; marketing, promotion, branding and networking opportunities; access to grants; use of the MBA IDEAcorns brain trust, with teams from the likes of Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Berkeley and Northwestern; and access to services from Google, Salesforce.com and Worldwide Marketing Partners. Then there's also the opportunity to take part in the New Orleans Entrepreneur Week "Jazz Fest of Entrepreneurship" celebration. For an application, click [here](#)

Jefferson Parish takes JEDCO strategy as its own

The Jefferson Parish Economic Development Commission apparently came up with such a good economic development strategy, the parish council has adopted it as its own. "Jefferson EDGE 2020" shifts the parish from the years of recovery that followed Hurricane Katrina into planning for the next ten years. Look for emphasis on aggressive business retention and expansion, ongoing development of the Churchill Technology & Business Park and the redevelopment of the Louis Armstrong International Airport's buy-out properties. Five issues are pegged as priorities: land development and redevelopment, workforce development, transportation and regional initiatives, advocacy and business outreach/quality jobs. "Jefferson Parish has earned a strong reputation as a business-friendly parish," says David Martin, chairman of JEDCO's board. "We are now well positioned to take a leadership position in the transformation of our entire region." To see the plan, click [here](#).

Getting an innovation-based economy going



What's it going to take to get an innovation-based economy going in Louisiana? The Baton Rouge Area Chamber has written the book — or a white paper, anyway — on the subject. The chamber says the state and private businesses need to pump more money into research and development to do the deed. BRAC released the paper yesterday, outlining strategies for developing the economy, saying more money for R&D would result in commercially viable innovations. "As a center of university and private sector research, the Baton Rouge area's competitiveness will hinge on the creation and cultivation of new ideas with market potential," says Adam Knapp, BRAC president and CEO. "The fastest growing sectors for job creation in the U.S. are driven by innovation." Read the full report [here](#).

Stores just keep coming to Hammond Square

The recession apparently passed by Hammond Square. Stirling Properties this week announced four more new leasing agreements: A 1,200-square-foot site for Purse Bag Pattie's, a 5,221-square-foot site for Maurice's [a clothing store], and 4,340-square-foot site for Rue 21 [another clothing store], and a 1,300-square-foot Smoothie King. This summer, the newly renovated mall welcomed Cafe Roma, Santa Fe Cattle Company Restaurant, Albasha Greek Restaurant, Best Buy, Verizon, Target and T.J. Maxx. The newly designed power/lifestyle center will be twice the size of the old mall.

Two corridor chambers top the rest

The corridor has two of the best chambers in the state. The East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce in Slidell has been named Small Chamber of the Year by the Louisiana Association of Commerce Executives, and the Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce took home the Large Chamber of the Year Award.

UL institute will boost state's emergency preparedness



The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources is partnering with the University of Louisiana at Lafayette to get us the gasoline we need during hurricanes and other emergencies. The department will spend a \$600,000 stimulus grant to work with the university's National Incident Management Systems and Advanced Technologies Institute, or NIMSAT, to enhance the state's emergency plan. The funding will go toward creating a system so Louisiana can coordinate government and private industry efforts to provide needed fuel during and after mass evacuations. The DNR is in charge of managing fuel supplies in emergencies. NIMSAT works to improve emergency preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation activities for people, businesses and infrastructures through research.

Corridor firms sweep interior design awards

Firms along the corridor were big winners in the regional International Interior Design Association Awards. Awards of Excellence in their respective categories went to the Pavilion for Women & Children at Lafayette General Medical Center by Architects Beazley Moliere of Lafayette; Caliente Grille in Hattiesburg, Miss., by Commercial Design Interiors of Baton Rouge; and Shaver Theatre at LSU by HMS Architects of New Orleans. Awards of Recognition in their respective categories went to Fidelity Homestead in Hammond, designed by Holly & Smith Architects of Hammond; NICU at Lafayette General Medical Center by Architects Beazley Moliere; LSU's Alex Box Stadium by Grace & Hebert Architects of Baton Rouge; St. Scholastica Academy Chapel in Covington by Holly & Smith Architects; the Broussard residence in Lafayette by L7 Architects in Lafayette; and the LSU Tiger Gift Shop by Commercial Design Interiors. A student Award of Excellence went to Stephen Knight of LSU for

Atlas Hotel; a student Award of Recognition went to Niki Landry of LSU for Thibodaux Children's Museum.

Omni Bank eliminates 'trip to the bank'

New Orleans-based Omni Bank has eliminated the need for a trip to the bank. Its Express Deposit service for small-business owners lets clients scan checks from customers on a desktop scanner provided by the bank, then deposit them electronically. Check files received by 5 p.m. will be credited that day; those sent after hours and on weekends and holidays will be processed the next business day. "Business customers save gas, time and labor by allowing them to scan and then deposit checks without actually going to the bank," says Pat Starnes, Omni Bank senior vice president for retail banking. The scanned checks also provide digital records of all checks deposited, reducing paperwork burdens. Users also have online access to images, deposits and reports that can be exported into their accounts receivable system. Omni Bank has branches all along the corridor in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Metairie, Kenner, Harahan, Gretna, Harvey, Mandeville and LaPlace.

Terry Ryder joins Middleberg Riddle & Gianna



Terry
Ryder

The former attorney to four of Louisiana's last five governors has joined the law firm Middleberg Riddle & Gianna. For nearly 20 years, Terry Ryder served as the attorney to Buddy Roemer, Mike Foster, Kathleen Blanco and Bobby Jindal. His past 12 years have been as senior attorney and advisor to the Governor's Office. Over the course of his career, Ryder has worked on thousands of state business matters across many areas of Louisiana government, including dispute resolution, gubernatorial pardons and commutations, legislation and agency rule-making. He has extensive experience in federal and state environmental laws and regulations. As an attorney for the firm's Baton Rouge office, Ryder will concentrate his practice in the areas of administrative, regulatory and compliance law.

Poll: Firms split on green building measures

Green building is a mixed bag in the firms for which 10/12 poll respondents work. About 43% say their firm has implemented some green building measures; 47% say they have not. The remaining 9% don't know. The 10/12 poll is not a scientific survey. It reflects the responses of the people who choose to participate.

Places to be on the corridor

:: **Today:** The St. Tammany West Chamber presents its Third Annual Cultural Economy Awareness Luncheon from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Holiday Inn in Covington. The program includes entertainment, artists and a panel of speakers. Cost is \$30 for chamber members; \$35 for non-members. To register, call 985-892-3216, ext. 2.

:: **Thursday:** The St. Tammany West Chamber presents a two-hour seminar on social media [Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn] from 8-10 a.m. at the chamber office, hosted by Craig Marinello of Next Step Resources. Cost is \$35 and space is limited to the first 50 registrants. To register, click [here](#).

:: **Sept. 9:** The Internal Revenue Service and Exceptional Entrepreneurs of Louisiana present a Small Business Forum from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the University of New Orleans, Building #27, 2000 Lakeshore Drive, Room 103.

Keynote speaker is Jim Stokes, former district director of SCORE. To RSVP, click [here](#), or call 504-558-3123.

:: **Sept. 9:** The Livingston Parish Chamber of Commerce hosts a Mayors' Forum at 11:30 a.m. at Forrest Grove Plantation, 8743 Stephenson Drive in Denham Springs. To register, click [here](#), or call 225-665-8155.

:: **Sept. 10:** The Louisiana Technology Park and Bascom Hunter are offering a Small Business Innovative Research Program at the Louisiana Technology Park, 7117 Florida Boulevard in Baton Rouge, for entrepreneurs and small businesses to learn to write successful grants. Cost is \$150. For more information, click [here](#).

:: **Sept. 14:** Southeastern Louisiana University President Dr. John Crain will discuss the university's role in rebuilding and revitalizing the Louisiana economy at the St. Tammany Economic Development Foundation's third-quarter luncheon at 11:30 a.m. at The Gallery on Taos Street in Slidell. Cost is \$30 per person. To register, call 985-809-7874, or click [here](#).

:: **Sept. 16:** The St. Tammany Economic Development Foundation presents a Business Assistance Forum at 8:30 a.m. in Room 325 of Southeastern Louisiana University's St. Tammany Center, 21454 Koop Drive in Mandeville. The forum is for commercial loan professionals in the banking industry, and presenters will discuss the Business & Industry Guaranteed Loan Program administered by the USDA. The event is free, but advance registration is required. To reserve a spot, click [here](#), or call 985-809-7874.

Viewpoint: Where the minds of Obama and Jindal meet



It took a while, LaPolitics columnist John Maginnis writes, but word finally reached down into the state bureaucracy that Gov. Bobby Jindal thinks using federal stimulus money for light rail projects is wasteful. A deputy in the state transportation department must have missed that part of the governor's speech on national television in February — or was laughing too hard at his delivery — when Jindal mocked an \$8 billion item in the stimulus bill for rail projects, along with his disdain for volcano monitoring. Then the governor's crack communications team must too have missed the Associated Press story about the department's interest in applying to the feds for \$300 million to begin passenger rail service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. To read the full column, click [here](#).

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