

# Chez Nous

en Louisiane

## Pearls of Wisdom

How the oyster industry  
recovered post oil-spill



**THE VENETIAN:**  
A RETRO BAR & GRILL

## E-Chez Nous

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### On The Cover

Jules Melancon's dredging knife lays on top a bed of fresh oysters from Independence Island

*Photo // Anatoly Bose*

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**Chez Nous**  
en Louisiane

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

### The Rationale



Creating the magazine was an interesting process. I must have changed my mind about every little detail hundreds of times. I went with the oyster story as my cover story because I found it to be the most appropriate story for a feature. Despite being on oysters, it covers a variety of different aspects throughout southern Louisiana, which I think best encompasses the direction of the magazine.

I included the venetian story because it added another dynamic to the magazine, it is a snapshot of the past. It gives the audience an insight into what times may have been like all those years ago, and the fact that it remains that way now is what makes it a unique story. Initially, I wasn't going to include the nutria story because it included 3 paragraphs on introduction that turned out to be fictitious. The concept however, of a culture or society adapting to an invasive species was an interesting one to me. In the end I decided to cut out the intro and use it as my third story.

For the Venetian story, I wanted to keep it simple, but give an old-fashioned feel, which is why I went with the black and white images at the top of the first page, each representing a particular description from the story itself. The oyster story was difficult to find pictures for because oysters just aren't that exciting, so I decided to go with a more spacious, in terms of white space, and modern look that I think goes with the magazine.

In the nutria story, I didn't want to over do it with the pictures because I had shortened the story and knew it wouldn't be longer than a couple of pages. Because most of the images I found were too overbearing for the article, I decided to go with the swamp at the bottom, as well as an image of a nutria coat as opposed to filling the story with nutria pictures.

The biggest challenge I found, was to come up with a new layout for each story without straying from the overall direction and theme of the magazine, while at the same time not being repetitive.

Overall though, it was an enjoyable project and I'm happy with how it has turned out.

*Signature*



# Venetian Bar & Grill

*a place where time sands still*

BY ANTHONY SEPAROVICH



Inside 401 Jackson Ave. in Thibodaux exists a hangout that hasn't changed much since the 1930s. It's faded yellow walls have heard it all. Local boys fighting in the second world war; teenagers gyrating to rock-and-roll music; men walking on the moon; townspeople gossiping about presidential scandals.

Framed black and white photographs line the walls, along with issues of Life Magazine with J.F.K. and Jackie on the cover. The bar's shelves are filled with bottles of liquor, lines of glass Coca-Cola bottles, stacks of yellowed newspapers, decks of cards. Above the cash register a sign reads, "Fresh homemade roast beef, \$7 a pint." If a new customer mistakenly does not bring cash, one of the waitresses will say, "If you don't have cash, you can mop the floors."

Time has worn away the tiny plaid pattern on the off-white counter top, leaving white splotches. Mismatched stools line the counter top — some are olive green, some are black. A few turquoise ones jump out from the other colors.

On these stools sit old friends rather than customers.



Behind the counter top, the ladies of Maronge's Venetian Bar and Grill shuffle back and forth, pouring coffee, grilling hamburgers and conversing with "the usuals."

Lionell is a usual. He's been eating breakfast at the Venetian since 1967, after he retired from the Army.

"I eat here every day, Monday through Friday," he says casually. "They're closed on Saturday and Sunday. . . I have to be sick not to come."

A smile appears on Ann Hue's face, who is working behind the counter. "Sometimes he's a little grumpy," she says. "We serve him anyhow."

Everything is good at the Venetian, Lionell says, but he just comes for breakfast. "I can't stand my wife's coffee. That's why I come here."

Lionell speaks with a deep, raspy voice. He sees with big brown-framed glasses and wears a 1944 Thibodaux High School ring.

"Burn the biscuit," he tells the waitresses, because he likes his biscuit toasted.

Larry Maronge, owner of the Venetian since 1980, has encountered many customers over the years. Upon seeing Lionell, he says:

"That's the worst one."

Lilly Hebert has medium length curly brown hair and rosy cheeks. In between waiting on someone, she acts as the pacifier.

"He's not that bad," she reassures.

But Lionell isn't insulted in the least by Larry's sarcasm. "We're friends – we like to kid each other."

Hanging on the shelves are campaign signs for local elections; one dates back to 1963. A Nicholls State banner hangs above the bar, and a sign with a mousetrap that reads, "Push the red button to complain," sits near the cash register.

There are a few gaming devices; there's a pool table with a Budweiser lamp hanging above it. By the window there are a couple of square tables with multi-colored mosaic lamps draping above them.

The crates of plastic soft drink bottles that line the wall across from the grill and stove are the only indicators of the present time.

"We don't have the young crowd like we used to," Larry says.



"It's an old bar. We don't stay open that late."

The grill opens at 4 a.m. and closes at one in the afternoon.

"I get over here 10 minutes to five to make sure everything is ready to go. I leave at about six, and I come back at about 7:30 and stay here until three."

"And that's enough for me."

Unlike teenagers today, Larry says the bar's veterans limit their drinking due to the threat of DWIs.

"It's not like in the old days. Attitudes have changed."

Larry bought the Venetian Bar and Grill from its original owners, the Italian Bilello brothers, almost 27 years ago. Before then, his grandfather and parents had leased the grill from the Bilellos.

"It's my livelihood," he says. "And it's got a lot of history, too."

Larry still refers to the grill, which does not serve donuts, as "the donut shop."

"They came out with the first donut machine in Thibodaux," he declares. "It stayed around until the early 50s."

He says donuts became too commercialized and his Sicilian family got rid of the machine.

But the hamburgers, sandwiches and poboyos have stood the test of time.

Behind the counter, Deanna Terracino, whose curly blond hair is pinned up, cooks meatballs. The guys joke about her throwing one at Lionell.

"He's scared," one of the guys teases.

And the banter continues.

"Free breakfast on Tuesdays?" Lionell inquires, because he has been waiting for his change.

Ann, with her short salt and pepper hair and blue sweater, is in the middle of serving another customer. "Hold your horses now," she tells Lionell.

"If I were you, I'd keep my mouth shut," one of the octogenarian customers taunts at him.

Deanna, whose eyes light up when she laughs, says the customers are no trouble.

"They pick at me, but it's just joking."

Between the old men and the women working behind the counter, there is talk about an 86-year-old friend who is in the hospital. A "get well soon" card is passed around, collecting signatures.



PHOTO // ANATOLY BOSE

JUST ANOTHER DAY Owner Larry Maronge meanders around the kitchen, making early mornign preparations for the day ahead.

"The same crew comes here every morning," Lionell says. "Lots of friends." Behind the counter, the ladies of Maronge's Venetian Bar and Grill shuffle back and forth, picking up breakfast items and preparing for the lunch crowd.

"You meet so many people," Lilly says. "I enjoy working with the people."

Ann has worked at the Venetian off and on for three years. She comes in when the crew needs the help.

"It lets me get away from home. At home you get tired of staring at the four walls."

"I should be retired. I've been working in this business my whole life," she says, and then continues wiping the counter top.

As Larry closes the Venetian for the day, the stools are empty, no one is behind the counter.

But the laughter of old friends resonates throughout. CN



## THE Secret MENU

Larry's Specialty Dishes

In addition to the Venetian's regular menu, owner Larry Maronge shared some of his specialty dishes that aren't on the menu, available only by request.

*Vegemite & Cheese Toasties*

Vegemite and pepperjack on Wheat

*Braised Lamb Shanks*

Lamb shanks braised with vegetables in broth

*Veal Schnitzel*

Pan seared veal topped with marinara and mozzarella

PEARLS OF

WISDOM

Local oysterman Jules Melancon dicusses life in the oyster business in the wake of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill - a catastrophe that spewed 4.9 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, devastating the oyster business along the south coast of Louisiana.



STORY BY FREDDY HUNTER  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADLAY ONEOS



OYSTERS AWASH: Oil-drenched oysters wash up along the Louisiana shoreline



The sun is blazing on the Independence Island oyster reef today.

With cap on head and a bandana around neck, Jules Melancon is well protected from the sun's rays. However, his cap, bandana and the awning on his flat oyster boat cannot protect against the summer heat. The only relief from the heat is a strong wind that ruffles the water's surface.

Melancon inherited Independent Island from

his grandfather. Though the island is now below water level, this reef and its oysters are under Melancon's oyster-farming expertise.

Business for Melancon as an oyster farmer and as owner of the Island Oyster Shack in Grand Isle has not been booming as it once was. "I used to go out there," Melancon says, gesturing to the open water. "I have that big, 60-foot boat, and we used to go and dredge and catch our oysters. But the land is not producing oysters no more."

Melancon's difficulties seem to lie primarily in the after effects of the British Petroleum (BP) oil spill that poisoned the Gulf of Mexico and the coastline in 2010.

Oystermen like Melancon received some compensation from BP, Melancon says, but not enough to uphold their businesses. "\$73,000, I believe it was. And since then, they never gave us anything. That's just enough for one year. But my future's gone."



**ON ICE:** Industry production is down, with 30 percent of consumers still fearing the effects of the oil spill on oysters.

## “THE STATE’S OYSTER PRODUCTION IS LITTLE OVER HALF OF WHAT IT USED TO BE.”

Many others involved in the oyster industry, whether farming or studying oysters, agree that this aspect of the Louisiana economy and culture has experienced crises in the past few years caused by hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike and Gustav, as well as flooding, some federal regulations regarding harvesting and, finally, the oil spill. “The state’s current production of oysters is a little over half of what it used to be,” says John Tesvich, chairman of Louisiana’s Oyster Task Force.

A fourth generation oysterman, Tesvich is concerned with how oyster harvesters will get back to work. “Most oyster growers and fishermen did not return to work until almost a year or more after the spill,” Tesvich says. “Some oystermen, but not all, made money working on the oil spill clean-up.” The oyster business continues to suffer from lack of consumer interest, “Market research indicates that about 30 percent of consumers still harbor fears of eating seafood from the Gulf,” Tesvich says. Because consumers are still afraid of eating oysters from the Gulf, oyster sales have decreased.

The BP oil spill, while impacting the oyster industry, has not been nearly as detrimental to oysters as the threat of too much fresh water diverted to Louisiana basins, says Mike Massimi, invasive species coordinator at the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program. “A freshwater diversion is a restoration strategy where you cut a hole in the levee, basically, and put a gate. And you can open the gate to let fresh water from the Mississippi River flow into the wetlands.”

Oysters cannot live in full fresh water, however, too salty an environment makes them more susceptible to predators. “They thrive in a more brackish, salinity zone,” Massimi explains.

## MORE OYSTERS WERE KILLED BY THE RUSH OF FRESHWATER THAN FROM THE OIL ITSELF

“Generally, [the diversions] worked. On the East Bank, there were some legal hiccups. [State officials] sort of got ahead of themselves, released a whole bunch of freshwater and destroyed a lot of areas that were good production grounds. The oystermen got together and sued. That sort of set the stage for future conflict between the oyster industry and coastal restoration,” Massimi says. That conflict has surfaced most recently in the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority’s 2012 master plan for coastal restoration.

The authority introduced its first plan in 2007 after Katrina to tackle marsh creation. The 2007 plan was “a wish list of a project, like if we had unlimited money we could rebuild this coast, we would release a bunch of fresh water diversions, sediment diversion up and down the river, we would do all this marsh creation,” Massimi says of those who wrote the plan. However, “with a diversion, you know you’re going to destroy some oysters, or at least displace them. You’re probably going to displace some shrimp, too, and maybe some blue crabs and definitely some red fish and speckled trout,” Massimi explains. “That first version of the plan in 2007 did not really do an adequate job of addressing those impacts.”

The most recent master plan for coastal restoration focuses on sediment buildup to recreate the deteriorating coastline.

According to the document, the CPRA has “built more levees, restored more land and invested more dollars than any time in the state’s history.” Rapid action is called for by the state and conservationists involved in the plan. Massimi believes, however, that the actions proposed, namely opening diversions to a full flow of fresh water, will not bring the oyster industry back to where it was before coastal disasters.

The logic behind the 2012 master plan is that if the smaller Caernarvon and Davis Pond diversions have nourished the estuary with fresh water and more nutrients, then a large freshwater diversion would move enough sediment to rebuild Louisiana’s coast. “I think that that’s a faulty premise. These two diversions were designed to manage salinity in the basins.

They weren’t designed to introduce a bunch of sediment,” Massimi says. “It’s like using a hammer when you should be using a screwdriver. It’s just the wrong tool for that job.”

Earl Melancon, Jr., Ph.D. and biological sciences professor at Nicholls State University, sat on the committee when the master plan was being formed. “It’s a process



of nobody gets what they want. Everybody kind of gets a compromise, but even in the compromise not everybody’s walking away with a happy face,” Melancon says. Gov. Bobby Jindal opened the diversions’ gates two years ago in response to the oil spill to counter the flow of toxic water from the Gulf, thus protecting fisheries all across the estuary.

More oysters were killed, however, by the rush of freshwater than by oil from the spill, Massimi says. “In the Barataria system, we were seeing about a 45 to 50 percent mortality; east of the River we were seeing 80 percent,” Melancon adds. Of the 700,000 acres of marsh bottom in Louisiana, the most productive oyster grounds make up 400,000 of those acres. “Virtually all 400,000 were killed by the freshwater,” Melancon laments, nodding slowly.

“Oil doesn’t kill oysters directly. What it can do is make them weak, physiologically weak, because the oil is in the water and they’re pumping that water through their gills,” Melancon explains. This weakening makes oysters more susceptible to infection and parasites. “It also can influence their reproductive cycle where, if they’re stressed, physiologically

stressed, they’re not going to be able to develop their reproductive organs very well, and they’re certainly not going to be able to grow very well,” Melancon says. He believes that some oysters, which might have been able to tolerate the freshwater, were so stressed from the oil that they could not survive.

Before reaching adulthood, oyster larvae are considered plankton. “The plankton was one of the most vulnerable groups of organisms to be impacted by this oil because of all that dispersant in it,” Melancon notes. “Instead of the oil just staying on the surface it became emulsified throughout the water column and had a detrimental effect on a lot of planktonic organisms.” The oil spill occurred during a spawning season for oysters, affecting the oyster larvae present in the estuary, which hindered another generation of oysters.

Those involved in farming and distributing oysters have likely been the most affected. At P & J Oyster Co. in New Orleans, the Sunseri family strives to stay afloat in the struggling oyster industry. Sal Sunseri, co-owner and vice president of the company, stands in the half-empty warehouse that is part of the Sunseri’s 136-year-old French Quarter establishment.



“Well, as you see, we’re not doing a whole lot here right now. Prior to the spill, this was a bustling place,” Sunseri says.

In 2010, the spill had threatened P & J Oyster’s existence. “I hate to say it, but I do see that there could be an end,” Alfred Sunseri, president of P & J Oyster said a few months after the spill. Now, with P & J Oyster still around, Sal Sunseri feels hopeful about their future: “We’ve been through wars, we’ve been through the Depression, we’ve been through ... so many hurricanes, so many events that have deterred the production of oysters. But you know what? We’re going to stick with it, keep going.”

P & J Oyster supplies oysters to the many surrounding restaurants in and around New Orleans. One such establishment, Borgne Restaurant, experienced the impact of damage to the oyster industry. “We have seen the price of local oysters rise in the past few years due to the simple relation of supply and demand,” says Brian Landry, executive chef at Borgne Restaurant. “As oyster beds are either killed by fresh water from storms, high river stages or the opening of freshwater diversions, the availability has decreased and thus the price has risen.”

The restaurant, opened by Chef John Besh early in January 2012, aims to use as much local seafood as possible to boost the local economy and support local oyster fishermen. “The trickle-down effect should be that, while we directly employ a bunch of individuals, that the money that we’re spending stays in our economy as well. And that one of our biggest fears is that if we do not protect the oystermen, we’re going to lose a great, American industry,” Landry says.

While oysters have often been found in Louisiana dishes, they may also be found in the cups of Louisiana restaurants as oyster stout. Abita Beer is using oysters to make Imperial Louisiana Oyster Stout, one flavor of their Select line of beer. Thanks to Kerry Yoes, winner of Abita’s home-brewing contest, Abita used the winning

**PEACEFUL:** *The sun beams down over the reef that once was Independance Island.*

recipe to develop its brandname stout in October 2011. Stout is a dark beer often made with roasted malt.

What makes this particular type of stout different is that fresh oysters are added to the boil of barley, oats, chocolate and caramel malts. “We are especially pleased to offer this new Select because it contains real Louisiana oysters,” says David Blossman, president of Abita Beer. “We want the world to know that seafood fresh from Louisiana is ready and waiting for them to enjoy in so many ways, including as an ingredient in draft beer.”

One woman uses oysters not for food or drink, but for fashion. Anne Dale, a gemologist and jewelry seller, cuts gems out of oyster shells to make stones for various pieces of jewelry. Owner of Anne-Dale Jeweler in Mandeville, Dale came up with the idea of using oyster shells for gems right after the oil spill occurred.

Dale joined many others who rushed to buy seafood after the spill, especially oysters. “My husband and I bought some oysters, shucked them open, and as the sun was hitting on the shell of the oyster, I noticed this glistening, and I thought, ‘Wow, look how beautiful. Why hasn’t anyone ever cut gem material from this oyster?’”

From there, the Dales began to cut gems out of them, polishing the shells into smooth stones. “It was incredible the luster, the vitreous luster that it produced,” Dale recalls. “And then the different shades: that beautiful white, like mother-of-pearl, gold bands and swirls that you see throughout the gemstone.” Thus, LaPearlite oyster gems were born.

Dale is determined to use only local oysters for her LaPearlite. She gets oyster shells from Motivait Seafood in Houma, using about 10 percent of the shells she obtains for the LaPearlite itself. Dale emphasizes the uniqueness of Louisiana oysters: “There is no other oyster like it. And that’s what makes the shell, the valve of that oyster, so unique, to be able to capture that in a gemstone— each one is different, very different – just like the community in all of the South.”

Jules Melancon looks out over the grand expanse that is the Gulf of Mexico. The sun, now preparing to set, casts a golden hue over the blue, crystalline surface of the water.

He stands tall on his flat oyster boat. Another day of harvesting is done. Another opportunity to earn his living has been grasped.

But it is still uncertain whether all this effort will be enough. Will the oyster industry ever return to where it once was?

Melancon does not have the answer. He’s only inherited the culture and 150-year-old tradition of his ancestors. “They would eat a lot of oysters; they lived a lot off the land,” Melancon says.

And live off the land he will. 



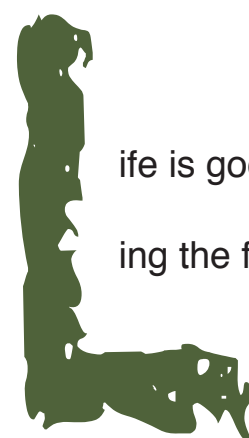


# NUTRIA

## MULTI-PURPOSE RODENT

The Invasive species that Louisiana has adapted to

BY MIGUEL ZEFF



Life is good in 1940 for Edward Avery McIlhenny. In addition to managing the family's Tabasco sauce business, M'sieu Ned, as McIlhenny is called by many, owns a booming bamboo farm on Avery Island, located between Lafayette and Morgan City, La. His other exploits include a livestock farm where he keeps ducks and cattle, crossbreeding varieties of each to make new species. Two years ago, McIlhenny added a new creature - nutria.

The rodents may be ugly as hell with their large orange teeth and rat-like tails. But the fur – the fur might make McIlhenny a fortune.

Of course, when he bought the creatures for \$100 from farmers in St. Bernard Parish, McIlhenny underestimated the time and effort that breeding nutria would take.

Those damn rodents breed quickly. In two years time, McIlhenny's nutria increased from 20 to nearly 1,000.

Nutria can also gnaw through almost anything. When they escaped from their enclosures, the nutria devoured practically every kind of vegetation they could get their long teeth on. McIlhenny had to reinforce their wooden

pen with wire screening, the only thing nutria seemed unable to chew through.

Nutria became free to consume any and all vegetation they encountered. And they bred at remarkable rates in the marshes. And since then, they have been a factor in problems to Louisiana marshlands and challenges for both trappers and environmentalists.

Environmentally, nutria have damaged thousands of acres of Louisiana's wetlands, referred to as the "nutria ground zero" by Dr. Shane Bernard, historian and curator of McIlhenny Co. and Avery Island, Inc. Because the nutria's diet consists of greenery, the rodents thrive on



PHOTO // BRICC BRACC

**NUTRIA NUISANCE:** *Known for its destructive behaviour, the rodent has found a new relevance in Louisiana.*

Louisiana's indigenous vegetation. They generally eat plants at the stem bases and roots, killing the entire plant quickly. Such consumption often leaves soil exposed to weathering and erosion, damage that has contributed to coastal erosion.

The Nutria Control Program of Louisiana seeks to help eradicate the nutria problem in the state. Approximately 400 people are currently enrolled in the program, while 320 of them are nutria trappers, says Edmond Mouton, the biologist program manager of Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries.

Nutria trapping used to be a profitable career for many: "Back at the turn of the century, even as late as the 1970s, there was quite a bit of money in trapping," Mouton says.

Nutria were considered valuable for their fur, their meat and the use of their excess parts for livestock feed. However, in the late 70s "the number of trappers started to fall, demand for fur started to fall and nutria prices dropped. People quit trapping nutria and the population exploded," Mouton explains.

Like trappers in the early 20th century, modern trappers use nutria trapping as a secondary source for income. Trappers in the control program "are paid \$5 for every tail they turn in," Mouton says. "It's not what it used to be by any means."

Chris Areas, a trapper who has received help from the Nutria Control Program, continues his family's nutria trapping tradition in St. Bernard Parish. Areas, who learned how to trap from his grandfather, bought old traps and inherited other equipment from his father. He believes that trapping is the best method for eradicating nutria because shooting drives the creatures into hiding.

Vernon Naquin of Houma makes his living by trapping nutria in the fall and winter and shrimping in the spring and summer. "It's an everyday thing, if you got a job, you can't go do no nutrias," Naquin explains. Nearly 50 years of nutria trapping has literally

paid off for Naquin: "I've been doing good with the trapping lately ... in the last two years."

He got started in trapping when he was 9 years old. "A friend of mine's daddy was doing that and I kind of liked it," Naquin says. "I catch a lot of nutria in the traps. That's my specialty."

"Okay, mister nutria ..." Naquin calls out right before he makes a kill, smacking one behind the head with a short wooden plank. He removes it quickly from his trap, explaining, "What you've got to do is hurry up and get them out of the way, so they don't bleed (into the marsh)". Naquin uses a combination of clubbing and shooting to land kills. "There's two things them nutria don't like: that rifle and that stick," Naquin says. "Now I love shooting 'em; that's the fun part. But you can't shoot 'em all the time ... why put the traps when

you're gonna chase 'em away from your traps?"

Part of Naquin's trapping job is skinning the animals. "I'm pretty quick at skinning 'em. I average about one nutria a minute." Naquin explains that fur trading used to be more profitable. He says he would not even bother skinning if the price for fur had not gone up in the last year. "If you know how to skin 'em, you can sell the hide. [But] they ain't worth nothing: \$2. If I wouldn't know how to skin 'em like I do, I wouldn't fool with it. There used to be good money in the furs, but those days are over."

Designers Cree McCree and Billy Reid argue that the days for good money in nutria fur are certainly not over. Both have utilized the fur as a fashionable means of using nutria that might otherwise go to waste. "I think we need to honor the animal by using the animal, not just killing it," says McCree.

McCree is the founder of Righteous Fur, a non-profit organization that seeks to raise awareness about coastal erosion caused by nutria. In 2011, Righteous Fur received

a grant from the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) to help produce and promote McCree's fashion line.

Billy Reid, an Amite-born resident of Alabama, presented his latest nutria fur fashion line during New York Fashion Week in January. "If there's such a thing as manly fur, nutria is it. I was duck hunting in Mississippi when it occurred to me. I know what it's doing to the wetlands, so we should do something with this," Reidsays.


While nutria fur finds its place in the fashion industry, most of the nutria becomes livestock feed. A

couple of people, however, have turned nutria meat into nutritious food for domestic animals. Hansel Harlan, a Baton Rouge attorney, and his sister, Veni, own Marsh Dog, a company that processes nutria meat into dog food. As a dog owner, Hansel was concerned about the quality of his dogs' food, "With constant food recalls, harmful foreign ingredients and multiple allergens, I didn't completely trust what was available so I began researching and experimenting," Hansel explains. Nutria meat is "high in protein and low in fat," says Michael Massimi, invasive species coordinator for BTNEP. "Because nutria consume organic, hormone-free plants, their meat is free of the artificial hormones often fed to sheep and cattle, the primary meats in dog food," Hansel further explains. Marsh Dog also received a grant from BTNEP.

Though not seemingly popular, nutria meat for human consumption is still a reality in some places. Edward "Fuzzy" Hertz, a retired trapper and former owner of Fuzzy's Bar in Lafitte, enjoys eating nutria meat. He and his family began eating it after years of trapping. "The meat was so pretty," Hertz says. So they began barbecuing, frying, and stewing nutria meat.

Also championing nutria meat is Chef Philippe Parola, an award-winning French chef. Parola began a promotional campaign with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to market nutria meat because it is organic. "During the campaign, my friends and great Chefs Daniel Bonnot, Susan Spicer and John Besh helped convince a majority of consumers that nutria meat is very high in protein, low in fat and actually healthy to eat," Parola says. The campaign put on events that highlighted dishes using nutria meat.

"With the help of Mr. Noel Kinler and Edmond Mouton of Wildlife and Fisheries, our group cooked nutria stews, nutria soups, roasted nutria, and grilled nutria at many functions. One particular event at Bizou Restaurant on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans featured a nutria dinner and a nutria-fur coat fashion show where 300 happy guests arrived to eat nutria prepared by Chefs Spicer, Bonnot and myself," Parola explains. This campaign experienced a couple of setbacks, however, the USDA did not approve nutria meat for the market while police began using nutria for shooting practice. After this, "local media reported nutria were seen in New Orleans gutters. Nutria, at this point, were being publicized as a nuisance species. Within days ... our efforts to sustain a nutria market were shot down," Parola laments. Despite the loss, Parola firmly believes in the health benefits of nutria meat for the public.

Referring back to how the nutria came to prominence in Louisiana, McIlhenny intentionally released his nutria into the wild in 1945. Why, we just don't know, but the cat, or nutria in this instance, got out of the bag. Regardless of how much or how little blame falls on McIlhenny, one thing is clear: there is forever a connection between the McIlhenny name and that pesky rodent in the history of these animals and Louisiana. 



# Donut dash

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Registration 8:00 am | Run starts at 9:00am

Nicholls State University

For more info, contact Adam at 985.696.0275

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Registration fee: \$25

Presented by Sigma Alpha Epsilon - Louisiana Chi - Nicholls State University



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