Voilà!

Forgotten People of a Forgotten Time
Voilà!

Fall 2007

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On the cover:
Sociology students spent a semester investigating the history of a deserted Chackbay church and its long-gone congregation.

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To the Point

If you haven’t been to the Nicholls campus recently, you’re missing out on history in the making. Nicholls is in the midst of the largest campus transformation in more than 20 years:

- new and renovated housing (not to exceed $55 million),
- a $14.4 million new recreation center,
- a renovated bookstore,
- $5.5 million in renovations to the cafeteria and student union,
- $14.7 million in renovations to Beauregard Hall,
- $5.2 million in road and parking lot improvements and
- $3.7 million in electrical upgrades.

By Fall 2008, Nicholls will have bid farewell to Meade, Long, Millet and Zeringue residence halls. In their places will be three new living facilities boasting the latest amenities and a separate convenience store.

Calecas and Ellender halls will undergo extensive renovations, with Calecas becoming home to the university police department and overflow housing and Ellender reducing the number of student beds and making room for office space.

All of the projects are being funded through the Nicholls Facilities Corporation from the sale of bonds, with the exception of Beauregard Hall renovations and the electrical upgrade, which will be state-funded.

New street and traffic signs, hanging from black ornamental posts, already bear the "N" logo and Nicholls colors. The new logo is also showing up on trash receptacles, soap dispensers, floor mats and bright banners that hang from poles on campus and along Canal Boulevard in Thibodaux.

More than just practicality (the soap dispensers require less cleanup and the trash bins can remain outdoors during hurricanes), it’s a matter of school pride, says Mike Davis, assistant vice president for administration. “We want Nicholls to look like the first-rate institution it is.”

Not Your Father’s (or Mother’s) Nicholls

From the President

As I enter my fifth year as president of Nicholls State University, I share a deep sense of satisfaction with our faculty, staff and students in the enormous transformation that is currently taking place within this institution. Nicholls is changing, and its changes are positive, profound and meaningful.

Next September, Nicholls will celebrate its 60th anniversary. For almost six decades, the institution admitted all high school graduates who wanted to try their hand at college work. We called that “open admissions,” a policy that was consistent with our mission to serve the higher education needs of the citizens of the Bayou Region, regardless of their high school preparation. Nicholls embraced that mission and experienced tremendous success in education.

But times have changed. The Bayou Region has matured, and a viable community college system has begun to function in the region. This has enabled us to redefine our mission, and we are now a “selective admissions” institution, enrolling the best-prepared students in our history. As a result, we are already experiencing better results in retaining our students, which will lead to higher graduation rates. This is good for everyone involved, but it is especially good for those who are investing in higher education: the parents who pay tuition, the taxpayers who demand accountability and the students who earn the degrees.

Selective admissions is a powerful driving force of change, but the real agents of change are our people: a genuinely dedicated faculty, a competent and hardworking staff and a better-prepared student body who will not tolerate mediocrity. We are proud that Nicholls has always been about people. But there is more!

There is also infrastructure, which is about supporting people and their work. Here at Nicholls there is a remarkable transformation taking place on our campus. This transformation, which includes new and renovated buildings, newly resurfaced streets and parking lots and new technology, will better support and enhance the learning, recreation, athletic and living facilities for our students. Some of these projects were featured in the last two issues of Voilà! Others are covered in this year’s edition. Read and enjoy. Best of all, come to the Nicholls campus to see for yourself. You will be delighted by what you see, and all of us at Nicholls will be delighted to have you.

Sincerely,

Stephen T. Hulbert

Student Recreation Center Rendering

Vernon F. Galliano Hall Interior Rendering

The three new residence halls will face grassy courtyards.
Police 101

It’s a worst-case scenario: two unidentified men armed with handguns are loose in Millet residence hall, and shots have been fired. This is the stuff of nightmares for parents, students, employees and law enforcement agencies. It’s also only a drill.

Teamwork and communication were the lessons of the day in June at rapid response drills that brought together law enforcement agencies likely to be first on the scene in a crisis.

Armed with radios and red and blue plastic guns, university police and other local law enforcement officers worked as a team to interview witnesses and brief colleagues before storming into Millet and Long halls in pursuit of “suspects.”

The ability to make informed decisions and work with unfamiliar agencies in the midst of gunshots, panicky students and employees, smoky hallways, blaring alarms and squawking police radios are skills you have to learn and practice, says Lt. Duane Schexnayder, the Louisiana State Police SWAT supervisor and coordinator of the event.

While they may have the occasional cup of coffee or lunch together, university police and Thibodaux police officers normally don’t have the opportunity to train together and get to know one another, Schexnayder says. “It’s the coordination that makes this important, having the terminology and the ability to communicate effectively with each other,” says Nicholls police Chief Craig Jaccuzo.

The training was the first step in a four-part plan to keep Louisiana campuses safe and prepared for emergencies. The remaining steps include emergency communication training for campus leaders, a campus physical security assessment and additional funding for the initiatives.

Consider that …

• Fall 2006 enrollment was 6,814, down only 1 percent after the 2005 hurricanes decimated the region.

• The average ACT score for first-time freshmen was up to 20.92 in 2006, from 19.33 in 2002. Nicholls posted the largest one-year ACT increase in the University of Louisiana System in 2006.

• The average ACT score for first-time African-American freshmen in Fall 2006 was 18.32, up from 16.24 in 2002.

• The 2006 class of first-time freshmen included 48 high school valedictorians, and more than 50 percent of entering freshmen earned TOPS scholarships.

• The number of students accepting academic scholarships increased by 33 percent increase.

• The number of African-American scholarship students grew from 23 in 2004 to 63 in Fall 2006, an increase of 174 percent.

• Since 2003 when Dr. Stephen Hulbert became university president, he has funneled more than $2 million into student scholarships.

• In Spring 2007, exactly 81.68 percent of first-time freshmen continued their studies at Nicholls after their first semester.

• The largest retention increase at Nicholls was the Spring 2007 return rate for African-American freshmen, 86.5 percent. In Fall 2001, slightly more than half of all first-time freshmen returned, and the rate was less than half for African-American freshmen.

• High school seniors in 2006 who wanted to get an early start earning up to six hours of college credit were eligible for half-price or even free tuition to attend Nicholls while in high school.

• All faculty now use Blackboard, an electronic system that allows them to engage in online discussions with students and post tests and study materials. This also enables classes to “meet” electronically in the event of a campus or regional emergency.
Success has indeed been sweet for six graduates of the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute. Although they chose the same major, they traveled different paths to reach their own version of culinary dreams. You can find four of them at some of Louisiana’s top restaurants and two at a major food manufacturer.

### Chef Holly Goetting (A.S., 2000)
Executive Chef at Charley G’s in Lafayette

**What I do:** I work with a kitchen staff of 12 at various food stations and prepare the daily catch during the week and expedite (bridge between wait staff and kitchen staff to ensure orders are filled and delivered) on the weekend. About 80 to 90 percent of the recipes used at Charley G’s are my creation.

**How I got here:** I started college at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette studying interior design and worked after class at restaurants like T.G.I. Friday’s. When I realized I enjoyed work more than school, I made the switch to culinary arts at Nicholls where I felt that I really fitted in. After graduation and a brief stay in Colorado, I went to work at my first choice, Charley G’s (the classiest restaurant in Lafayette), and worked my way up from pastry chef. I love the team effort at Charley G’s and having the freedom to be myself and get my creative juices flowing.

**Honors:** The first woman executive chef in Lafayette, Goetting was named a 2005 Chef to Watch by Louisiana Cookin’ magazine.

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### Tuna Tartar with Wasabi-Soy Vinaigrette & Black Sesame Crackers

**Serves:** 2

- 8 oz. tuna, sashimi grade, small dice
- 8 oz. seaweed salad
- 3 oz. wasabi-soy vinaigrette
- 6 black sesame crackers
- 1 tsp. black sesame seeds
- 3 in. PVC pipe mold
- 3 wonton wrappers

**Wasabi-Soy Vinaigrette**

- ½ shallot, minced
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 tbsp. lime juice
- ¼ c. soy sauce
- ¼ c. wasabi paste
- 1 tbsp. rice wine vinegar
- ½ c. vegetable oil

Mix all ingredients except oil in blender. Turn blender on low and add oil in a thin, steady stream. Set aside.

**Assembly:**

Place PVC pipe in center of plate. Put seaweed salad inside and press down firmly. In a small bowl toss tuna in vinaigrette and place on top of seaweed salad. Press down firmly again and pull mold off. Drizzle wasabi-soy vinaigrette around tuna tartar mixture, sprinkle with sesame seeds and top mixture with 3 crackers.

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For black sesame crackers:

Cut three wonton wrappers diagonally. Fry in oil until golden and crispy. Sprinkle sesame seeds on crackers immediately after removed from the oil.

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Chefs du Jour
**Chef Kevin Bordel... 135 624 1150**

**Chef Tony Zeringue (B.S., 2006)**

**Corporate Chefs in Research and Development at Bruce Foods in New Iberia**

**What they do:** They formulate new products to bring to market and develop recipes, especially those using Bruce Foods products.

**How they got there:**

**Kevin:** I used to work as a purchasing agent for the Department of Defense, which was really stressful. As a stress reliever, I used to come home on the weekends and cook and entertain. It took me about a year to figure out that’s what I should be doing full time.

**Tony:** The best part of my job is being able to develop new products and recipes and then actually see them come to life – published in magazines or online or on the menu at a restaurant. I love walking into a supermarket and seeing a product on the shelf and being able to say, “This is my product, I helped to formulate it.” There is no better feeling in the world.

**Why they do it:**

**Kevin:** I’ve always been interested in the food science part of cooking. I love learning how ingredients react with each other. I get to spend a lot of time working with our marketing department, reading consumer data and surveys and discovering what consumers need and want.

**Tony:** We try to improve a product that’s already on the market and make it unique to us, creating our own market niche. I also look at ways to improve a product that’s already on the market and make it unique to us, creating our own market niche.

**Why I do it:** After graduating from Nicholls, I moved to Chicago and began working in hotel/restaurant tourism at a large private club. Even though I was supposed to be working in the front of the house, I was always drawn to the back of the house. That’s where I had more fun.

**How I got there:**

**Kevin:** Growing up in New Orleans, I recall eating at my dad’s favorite restaurant – Brigtsen’s. It’s a small family operation, just the kind I’d like to own one day. My mother was my first cooking inspiration, and my dad has a real passion for food, too. As a teen, I had jobs waiting tables and bussing tables in local restaurants. I graduated from the University of New Orleans with a history degree, but then realized I missed the kitchen.

**Tony:** Cooking is in your blood if you grew up in south Louisiana. I remember watching my grandparents and parents cooking and just waiting for the day when I was old enough to reach the stovetop to cook. I started working in research and development as an intern at Popeye’s corporate headquarters in Atlanta and discovered I loved doing it. When Bruce Foods contacted the culinary institute looking for a research and development chef, I did everything in my power to be chosen.

**Bruce’s Sweet Potato Bread**

**Prep Time:** 20 minutes

**Cook Time:** 1 hour

**Yield:** 3 loaves (2-lb. tins) or 6 loaves (1-lb. tins)

1 (29 oz.) can cut yams (drained and mashed)
3/4 c. white flour
3 c. brown sugar
2 tsp. baking soda
1½ tsp. sea salt
3 tsp. cinnamon
1 c. vegetable oil
4 eggs
2/3 c. water

**Vegetable spray, as needed**

Mix flour, brown sugar, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, eggs, oil and water in large mixing bowl with paddle. Add the yams and mix to incorporate evenly. Pour mixture into loaf pans sprayed with vegetable spray, filling half way, and bake at 350° F for 1 to 1½ hours or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the bread comes out clean. Allow bread to cool and then store in plastic wrap.

**Chef Ian Barrilleaux (A.S., 2004)**

**Pantry Chef at Brigtsen’s Restaurant in New Orleans**

**What I do:** I prepare sauces, sides, soups and specials, man the grill station and manage all the customer orders. It’s a small restaurant, so we all chip in on tasks.

**How I got here:** Growing up in New Orleans, I recall eating at my dad’s favorite restaurant – Brigtsen’s. It’s a small family operation, just the kind I’d like to own one day. My mother was my first cooking inspiration, and my dad has a real passion for food, too. As a teen, I had jobs waiting tables and bussing tables in local restaurants. I graduated from the University of New Orleans with a history degree, but then realized I missed the kitchen.

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**Sunshine Daydream Roasted Root Vegetables**

**1 c. golden beets, peeled, medium dice**

**1 c. sweet potatoes peeled, medium dice**

**1 c. roasted corn (2-3 ears)**

**½ c. red onion, finely diced**

**2 tsp. fresh thyme**

**1 tbsp. fresh oregano**

**Apple cider vinegar**

**White and black pepper**

**Salt**

**Truffle oil**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heat a skillet to medium with a small amount of olive oil. Add sweet potatoes and sauté until slightly colored. Season to taste with white and black pepper. Transfer sweet potatoes to a sheet pan and place in the oven for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring at least once. On another sheet pan, season the beets with white and black pepper and a bit of olive oil to coat. Cook 30 to 35 minutes in oven, stirring at least once.

To roast corn, heat a black iron skillet. Season cornobs with salt and black and white peppers and toss with a bit of olive oil. Place cobs into skillet and continue to roll and look for caramelization. Don’t worry if some kernels blacken; this is good flavoring. Cut the corn off the cob.

In a large bowl, combine roasted corn, golden beets, sweet potatoes and red onion with the oregano and thyme. Add apple cider vinegar to adjust seasoning. Add truffle oil to taste (a little goes a long way). Season to taste and serve immediately.
Chef Sarah Todd (B.S., 2006)
Pastry Chef at Houmas House in Darrow

What I do: I create all the desserts (about seven types per week) for Latil’s Landing Restaurant, Café Burnside, and for catered events like weddings.

How I got here: I learned how to cook from my mom. In high school, I’d cook for all my friends, and they all told me I should be a chef because they loved my dishes. I was born in New Orleans, but grew up in Connecticut and came back here to go to culinary school and work.

Why I do it: Houmas House gives me the freedom to experiment and try new desserts.

Pear Wellington

4 pears
2 sheets of pastry dough
½ c. butter
½ lb. brown sugar
2 tsp. nutmeg
2 tsp. cinnamon
½ c. heavy whipping cream
1 jar caramel sauce
2 c. water
½ c. lemon juice
3 c. flour
1 ice bath (water and ice)

Cut one of the pears into cubes. Use an apple corer to remove the core of the remaining pears. Bring water and lemon juice to a boil. Cut pears in half, add to water and boil for 5 minutes. Place the halved pears in an ice bath. In a skillet, melt the butter over medium heat. Add brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and cubed pears to the butter. Stir for 2 minutes. Add the heavy whipping cream and stir. Place the mixture into a bowl and add the flour. Stuff the mixture into the halved pears. Cut one of the pastry sheets into 6 squares. Wrap the stuffed pears with the pastry dough. Cut the other sheet of pastry dough into 6 strips, then wrap the strips around each pear. Bake on a greased baking pan in the oven for 5 to 10 minutes or until golden brown.

Chef Jonathan Lanius (B.S., 2007)
Kitchen Manager at Mr. B’s Bistro in New Orleans

What I do: I work the “middle of the house,” expediting orders and supervising cleaning, linens and more.

How I got here: My culinary career began as a dishwasher at the hospital where my mother worked. I intended to be an engineer, but decided culinary school was more suitable.

Why I do it: I love meeting the customers in the front of the house. If I open my wallet, it’s full of business cards from people I meet. The good thing about the culinary institute is that it exposes you to every aspect of culinary – working the front of the house, being sommelier and working as executive steward, in addition to cooking.

Shellfish Pasta

½ lb. shellfish, preferably crab meat
Creole seasoning, preferably blackening seasoning to taste
Butter
2 c. heavy whipping cream
Crab boil
Pasta (penne is best)
Parmesan, freshly grated
Chopped parsley

Sauté crab meat in Creole seasoning, to with a little butter. Add whipping cream and reduce to a very thick au sec (almost dry) consistency. Add about a teaspoon (or more if you are daring) of crab boil and about a teaspoon more of the Creole seasoning, being very careful not to apply heat to the sauce again from this point to avoid breaking it (the fat separates from the other sauce ingredients). Swirl in about 3 to 4 tablespoons of whole butter to make a beurre blanc sauce (a white butter sauce that is delicate, smooth and richly textured). Pour over the pasta of your choice (it looks best over penne) and garnish with freshly grated parmesan and chopped parsley. Serve with a semi-sweet white or rosé wine.
In the lingo of higher education, “service learning” ranks right up there with “didactic” or “program outcome measurements” on the list of buzzwords that leave the rest of us confounded. But a look beyond the usual clichés applied to service learning reveals a trend worth understanding and keeping.

Nicholls students and other volunteers, armed with hammers, paint brushes, tape measures and saws, worked on half a dozen homes under construction for people displaced by the hurricanes of 2005.
The outcome, hopefully, is graduates who consider service to their community a part of being responsible citizens. It also brings a sense of accomplishment and even awe to some students.


Harper, an education senior from UL Lafayette, says she wanted to do something to impact herself and others. “It’s the families … you inspire me,” she says.

Marquita Christy, a Nicholls nursing sophomore from Donaldsonville, calls herself a “girly girl.” “I’ve never really built anything. I thought I’d be painting inside the house. But I was framing walls, nailing and installing struts and hurricane bolts on the foundation. I’ve got blisters and dirty nails, sore feet, bruised thumbs … I think I’m having more fun than we’re supposed to.”

Learning Outside the Classroom

Service learning isn’t a one-way road – user, the students perform a service to the community, but they’re also putting their classroom lessons to work.

In Trisha Zeringue Dubina’s graphic design class, senior art students get the chance to take on real clients and prove their skills prior to graduation. Each student is assigned a non-profit client from the community. Students then create an entire campaign of artwork to promote their client’s business or events. “We have clients lined up for years waiting to be assigned a student,” Dubina says. “They’re grateful to get professional-caliber work, which they could never afford as non-profits.”

In exchange, the students get to design logos, newspaper advertisements, billboards, signs and more for real clients. They can begin their design careers with professional work in their portfolios and experience what it’s like to hear that a client doesn’t like their design or, better yet, that it’s exactly what they wanted.

Or they can realize this isn’t the career for them. “This is a dose of reality,” Dubina says. “You have to be able to take criticism and work with all kinds of clients, even the difficult ones and the ones who don’t know what they want. Their satisfaction determines your success.”

The point isn’t to undercut the professionals in the field, and it isn’t just about volunteering, she says. It’s really all about learning:

“This benefits the students and the organizations. My students now have a better sense of community and understand that they need to give back.”

Donegan, a business administration sophomore at Nicholls, is with two of his Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity brothers Ryan Donegan and David Vicknair measure, trim and hang their way through their first building project.

Voilà!

A wall of vinyl siding takes shape as Kal Savoie and his Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity brothers Ryan Donegan and David Vicknair measure, trim and hang their way through their first building project.
University archivist Clifton Theriot unlocks a door, slips on white cotton gloves, slides open one of 15 wide, shallow drawers and gently takes out a colorful 1744 map of the French Quarter. “It’s in German,” he says. A moment later he holds up an original 1580 map of North and South America, commenting, “It’s inaccurate, but close.”

In other drawers are such treasures as 48 Shakespearean lithographs dating back to 1803. And there are almost 150 hand-colored John James Audubon lithographic plates depicting animals, all published between 1845 and 1848. Both collections were given to Nicholls in 1965 by Lee and Margaret Shaffer of Terrebonne Parish.

To Theriot’s left and right are dozens of rare books, one printed in 1609, another in 1651. There’s a book of poetry by the mother of Francis T. Nicholls. Nearby are books signed by Lafcadio Hearn, Frances Parkinson Keyes and Huey Long.

Ellender Memorial Library Archives and Special Collections documents almost everything related to the culture and history of the area between Franklin, New Orleans, Baton Rouge and the Gulf of Mexico. Some books and materials concern local plantations, the entire state, the United States and even Europe. Most collections have been carefully processed—organized, indexed and cataloged. For genealogists there are about 100 printed volumes that list the births, marriages and deaths that occurred through the years in each Catholic church parish in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge dioceses. Tales of plantations, natural disasters and senators all sit waiting in vertical files and on 5,500 linear feet of compact shelving—some of it buried in letters, caught in photographs or documented in centuries-old newspapers or in the private papers of prominent citizens like Sen. Allen J. Ellender.

The collection of the late Baysou Lafourche historian William Littlejohn Martin contains thousands of historic photos, with all people and places painstakingly identified.

Lost in time

Time-Life Books, film companies and the History Channel have called upon Nicholls archives in the past. Upon receiving an inquiry, Theriot says, “I never tell anyone no, but sometimes it may take a month or so for us to find an answer or the needed material.”

A certified archivist, Theriot holds degrees in history and information science. He says the Nicholls archival collection is so vast that someone could spend years exploring it and still not see everything.

Archives uses a modest annual budget to acquire just-published Louisiana books and other items, but donated materials are the backbone, says Carol Mathias, Ellender Memorial Library director and its archivist from 1991 to 2002. “Just about everything has been given by people who understand the value of documenting the area and keeping its history alive,” she emphasizes. “Many people don’t understand what a gold mine of historical information Nicholls archives is.”

Giving the gift of time

Mathias and Theriot welcome archival donations and the help of capable volunteers. Dr. Philip Uzee, after his 1984 retirement as Nicholls archivist, translated hundreds of documents written in French. Marie Jeanne Landry of Cut Off and Goldie Legendre of Thibodaux have spent two days a week for more than a decade processing and computerizing Lafourche courthouse records from the late 1700s to the 1940s.

Thibodaux Fireman’s Fair, 1915

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It’s been 12 years for Marge, 11 for me,” Legendre says. First they had to unbundle and dust off documents found

My dearest little wife

I am now on the battle field. It is early and the battle has not begun. All of us are well. I have just passed two days hard fighting without being hurt. We had some seven killed and a number hurt. A young Bergeron in my company was killed. Oh darling I fear so much that you will give up. I pray little wife to be spared for your sake. Oh darling please be courageous.

Your loving husband

Bobbie

No. 301 in Martin-Pugh Collection:

Vicksburg, December 29, 1862

Tell anyone no, but sometimes it may take a month or so for us to find an answer or the needed material.”

A certified archivist, Theriot holds degrees in history and information science.

Library archives preserve Audubon, Shakespearean and JFK treasures and document the Bayou Region’s colorful past.

A Goldmine of History
In the attic of the old Lafourche jail. Most were in French and English, some in Spanish. The collection includes an 1855 report on conditions in the Lafourche jail ("filthy and nauseating"), an 1855 death bill and cattle-brand certificates. But most of those records are writs, deeds and lawsuits, to say nothing of birth, death and marriage certificates. Some are original documents, some copies. "Can you imagine copying documents by hand way back then," Legendre says in astonishment.

"Marge did the database for all 25,000 records," she says. As a result, reference to plantations, people, businesses and similar topics can be easily found. "I love it," Legendre says of her volunteer work. "You find out so many interesting things." She considers slave records particularly interesting, "especially those in the 1700s that list slaves coming from Africa by way of Haiti."

Speaking of her work on old Lafourche records, Landry says, "That was fun because most of my people are from Lafourche – Guillot, Thibodaux and what-have-you. I was so interested that sometimes I would come in for an extra day." While organizing a collection of sheet music dating as far back as 1868, she tells of having found bullets among the original documents, some copies. "Can you imagine copying documents by hand way back then," Legendre says in astonishment.

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"Confederate States" stamps. Because the conditions. Many envelopes have five-cent "Confederate States" stamps. Because the letters have been transcribed, no researcher need wear gloves or be slowed by quaint penmanship.

Theriot delights in introducing freshmen to the archives when their classes tour the library. He lets them see and hold letters signed by Presidents Roosevelt, Eisenhower and Johnson. They even see and hold Ellender’s invitation to John F. Kennedy’s presidential inauguration.

From the Martin-Pugh papers, which extend from the 1830s to the 1920s, Theriot is able to show letters from four sons telling of their Civil War battlefield experiences. There are also letters from their relatives on the bayou describing home-front conditions. Many envelopes have five-cent "Confederate States" stamps. Because the letters have been transcribed, no researcher need wear gloves or be slowed by quaint penmanship.

Theriot enjoys showing visitors Civil War letters penned in the normal fashion and then turned 180 degrees for additional writing across the previously written lines, all because of the paper shortage. He even has letters on which the penmanship crosses horizontally, vertically and diagonally.

Theriot also shows students The Runner of the Ironsides, a newspaper printed in Thibodaux by Union forces on April 14, 1863. "We have two issues, the only two in Louisiana," he says, "although there are one or two somewhere up North." Students are surprised to see the first Nicholls catalog and its listing of the 1948 registration fee of only $17.50.

When people give items to the archives, they are asked to sign a formal agreement before Nicholls accepts what has historical value and declines inappropriate items, such as museum objects. In rare instances, exceptions will be made, as in the case of Evangeline Baseball League items like uniforms and mites that accompanied league photographs and records dating from 1934 to 1957. Archives also has a Civil War canon ball.

An ever-growing collection

Growth has created an "Archives II," a huge room on the other side of the building housing mostly unprocessed items. An assistant archivist was added to the staff during the summer, primarily to process collections according to professional standards. The papers of former President Donald Ayo await processing.

"Archives II" also contains the J.A. and J.C. Lovell collection of historic field notes, maps, abstracts and aerial photographs, a boon to professional surveyors interested primarily in Lafourche and Terrebonne tracts. The collection, bought by Louisiana Land & Exploration in 1962 and given to Nicholls in 1995, is stored in enormous but shallow pull-out trays.

Some Nicholls collections have been duplicated and shared with area libraries, such as the genealogical papers of Olga Laurent, a schoolteacher from the river parishes, who gathered information about many families along the River Road.

Mathias also cites the popular collection of Doris Mae Ledet of Thibodaux, "a premier genealogist in this area, who allowed us to make copies of much of her material."

Nicholls archives began in 1964 when the library moved from a few rooms in Ellkins Hall to Polk Hall. It expanded when the Ellender building opened in 1980. In addition to processing and maintaining the collection, the staff stays busy responding to requests, such as those of people who planned the 2007 observance of Lafourche Parish’s bicentennial.

Quirky Archives Finds

From an 1881 Lafourche Parish case involving stolen peans: the charge sheet, the affidavit, the warrant, the subpoena, the guilty judgment – and 22 peans in an evidence envelope.
Age-old Louisiana traditions are as much in peril as the land in which they’re embedded. Little by little, Nicholls is trying to keep the Louisiana of legend alive.
Shalonda Johnson, graduating sociology senior from Franklin, began contacting authors of past newspaper articles about St. Luke’s, with little luck. Disquire Johnson, sociology senior from Bayou Dularge, set out to the Lafourche Parish Clerk of Court’s office to collect the church’s property records. Immediately, she also faced a challenge. No records could be found for a St. Luke’s Baptist Church on La. 20 in Chackbay. Through hours of Internet searching and perhaps a little luck, the students discovered the church’s dual name of St. Luke’s/Little Zion. That was news even to past members of its congregation.

Johnson retrieved documents, under the name Little Zion, dating back to 1802 at the initial subdivision of the church’s property, which she believes was part of Cleona Plantation. It’s hard to be sure, though, since all transactions were made in the name of private individuals. The church property still belongs to remaining members of the congregation. St. Luke’s was probably built soon after the deed was signed in 1883. Probably, some mysteries still remain after a semester of searching, documenting and speculating.

Gaining momentum
Tina Granger, sociology junior from Houma, was connected to Shanklin through the Lafourche Historical Society. The two quickly began a ritual. Once a week, Granger and Shanklin met at Galliano Hall cafeteria to eat lunch and travel back in time. Shanklin brought family photos, genealogy charts and her memory. Granger brought an attentive ear.

Both began filling in the blanks in the genealogy of Shanklin’s father, the Rev. Andrew W. Robinson. A genealogical chart Shanklin had from her great-grandfather Joseph Parks contributed tremendously. Records don’t make piecing history easy, though. Names are often misspelled or change. Granger and Shanklin plan to speak with other descendants at the Parks family reunion. Olinda Ricard, management senior from Killen, Texas, has helped create a survey to gather more memories from those in attendance. St. Luke’s has become a personal mission for Granger. Regardless of whether a family connection exists or not, she is immersed in the project. More can and must be done. If nothing else is done, what will protect the remains of the church?

Research alone won’t cut it. On a trip to the church property, Shanklin and Granger find several eulogy candles arranged in a circle in the center of the building’s floor, perhaps from a ritual. When they return weeks later, the evidence is gone. Granger snaps her fingers. “The building could have gone up in flames just like that.”

Preserving the past
St. Luke’s has been abandoned since the 1970s. Robinson retired, and his son-in-law, the Rev. Joe Woods, was asked to become pastor. However, Woods already had a church under his wing and asked St. Luke’s congregation to join him there. St. Luke’s entered what Granger refers to as its “winter years.”

Yet on this April day, it is alive. Vehicles begin to fill the church property, Shanklin is asked to produce a book, which will be sold to benefit the church. Records don’t make piecing history easy, though. Names are often misspelled or change. Granger and Shanklin plan to speak with other descendants at the Parks family reunion. Olinda Ricard, management senior from Killen, Texas, has helped create a survey to gather more memories from those in attendance. St. Luke’s has become a personal mission for Granger. Regardless of whether a family connection exists or not, she is immersed in the project. More can and must be done. If nothing else is done, what will protect the remains of the church?

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Returning Life to the Legends

New Balance sneakers tap to the slow, steady beat. An elderly woman wearing sweatsuits sways to the soulful sound. Men and women in business attire take a break from their workday. It’s a meeting of the generations—in what feels more like a family reunion than a campus event.

The same thing happened in the northern United States. As roads replaced rivers, barge owners and boatbuilders became shipbuilders and ship owners. But it’s not just the boat building that was lost. "The traditions associated with boat building were lost," says Benoit. "It’s so much more than just building the boat. It’s the skills associated with boat building, the history of boat building, the family traditions." But Butler is changing that.

"Boat building is definitely an art," Butler says, showing off a dugout pirogue built in 1945. "However, a lot of times it takes people from out of the area to recognize what a treasure and what a rich culture we have here."

A museum dedicated to Louisiana boat building has long been Butler’s goal. He’s now close to achieving it. An agreement has been signed with the town of Lockport to relocate the boat collection to the old Ford building. However, renovations of the previously unoccupied building are expected to cost more than $200,000—an obstacle that has delayed the relocation.

Butler drives to the back of campus to check on what he suspects is a 300-year-old, bield Cypress Indian dugout canoe. Few visitors get to see the center’s gems; hidden behind the campus maintenance complex. Butler points out the scars where the Indians burned the wood too much when trying to shape the boat. Seashells were probably used to scrape off the bowed bottom. Much time and talent went into forming such a simple vessel. Much time and talent have gone into preserving this Louisiana art. Soon, both will be properly honored.

Picking up the Cajun culture

His native bird carving is authentic, crafted only after much research and bird watching. Lane Brigham has displayed his Louisiana art for four years at the university’s annual Folklore Festival. And somehow, sitting amid Cajun woodcarvers, authors, jewelers, painters and musicians, he gives off no evidence of his west Texas ranch roots.

Brigham, associate professor of family and consumer sciences, got his first taste of Louisiana living in 1970 in Shreveport, but soon his education and career took him to New York, Mississippi and Iowa. Brigham and his wife, Gail, continued to visit south Louisiana, mostly for fishing trips to Grand Isle, until they discovered a position at Nicholls.

The boat displays in the library reminded Brigham of the men he had often noticed crafting wooden shrimp boats along the banks of Bayou Lafourche. He enrolled in the boat-building class and created his own lake skiff and pirogue. He bought boats from others and accumulated a neat collection.


Brigham finished his first project but was too busy with his boat building to continue. Brigham’s sons accumulated numerous carving tools but soon gave up the hobby for more interesting endeavors—girls and cars.

In 2001, Brigham introduced carving to some of his colleagues from Iowa, and his interest was again sparked. He began taking carving classes twice a week.

“When I got home from classes, I was so wired,” Brigham says. “I couldn’t get to sleep until midnight or 1 a.m. The people in the class reminded me of people I grew up with in west Texas. They even told the same jokes. But, I was tired all week and I didn’t feel as rested and sharp as I wanted to be for my classes.”

Brigham began carving on his own, painting with acrylics instead of oils and feeling well-rested. He also switched from carving duck decoys to birds native to the area, particularly songbirds. His artwork recreates his childhood experiences of watching, and sometimes shooting, birds.

“Birds are so fleeting. You can never touch them,” he says. Brigham believes his knowledge of how to carve one day, perhaps when they find the extra time and passion. They haven’t shown much interest since the days of the French Food Festival. But they guard their carving tools. After all, the passion is in their blood.
Fruits of Labor

Ag faculty lend a hand to citrus growers.

By Dr. Anita Tully

Look along any south Louisiana highway in the fall and you'll likely see roadside stands (often in the form of battered pick-up trucks with bright blue tarps stretched over the sides or hand-lettered signs). It's as much a part of the landscape as swamps and hopeful New Orleans Saints fans.

But hurricanes Katrina and Rita altered that landscape forever. Almost overnight, Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes became the state's leading citrus producers.

Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes emerged after hurricanes Katrina and Rita as top Louisiana producers of citrus. Don Dufresne (inset) and George Toups of the Nicholls agriculture program are conducting a series of tests on citrus trees at the university farm to enhance early ripening of fruit and establish optimum sugar-acid ratios.

Dufresne and Toups say two factors are most important: First, be sure to test soil conditions and irrigation methods, soil and leaf analyses of leaves to assure that minerals are reaching all parts of the plant. Soil and leaf tests can be arranged by county agents for a minimal charge.

To start or expand a home citrus garden, a local chapter of Future Farmers of America can be contacted to purchase trees that grow well in your area.

Source: Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

Citrus Tips

• Look for firm, heavy fruit with smooth skins free from soft spots.
• Don't let color be your only guide. Even skins with light green color can hide ripe fruit.
• Citrus will keep several days at room temperature or for several weeks in the refrigerator in vented plastic bags or vegetable bins.
• Small fruit can be just as juicy and sweet as large fruit.
• Navel oranges make excellent juice, but acids make the juice bitter within four hours. Drink it fresh.
• Lemon juice frozen in ice cube trays and stored in plastic bags will provide “fresh” lemon juice for many months.
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Jane is a new second-grade teacher. One afternoon in October, she is confronted by the upset parents of Charlie Johnson, one of her students. Charlie, they say, told them how Jane unfairly made him sit in the time-out chair because he was talking. How could Jane do such a thing, they ask? Didn't she ask Charlie's reason for talking before she punished him? Why is she being unreasonable?

When college students set their sights on guiding the next generation of students as schoolteachers, they often have fond visions of helping curly-haired little girls finger-paint or smiling little boys proudly recite their ABCs for the first time. What they sometimes overlook are the ups and downs of also dealing with the parents of their students.

It's a package deal, says Dr. Deborah Bordelon, dean of the Nicholls College of Education. “Teachers not only have to work with parents, but they should make it a priority,” she says. It’s part of what Bordelon calls the “tripod of support” that makes children successful in school: a collaborative effort by parents, educators and students.

It takes some effort to make this work; though. Especially when most college courses for future teachers focus on developing lesson plans, assessing student performance and using innovative teaching methods—skills that won't help when faced with an irate parent.

That's why education seniors at Nicholls are required to go to instructors like Annette Breaux, Nicholls teacher induction coordinator, before they begin their semester of student teaching. She's something of a guru of practical tips for young teachers. Her seminars and private lessons put the practical spin on all the theories they've learned as college students.

"New teachers aren't really prepared for these real-life situations," she says. "They've studied the theories, but it just isn't real to them yet."

Breaux can tell them that the appropriate response in the scenario described above is: Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, we still might disagree when you leave here today, but I have to tell you how much I respect your coming here and taking an active role in Charlie's education. Thank you. Now, let's sit down and talk.

A calm response like that one will immediately defuse the situation, she says. And that's one of the keys to working together as a team with parents and students. The same strategies that apply to students apply to parents: don't be defensive, let students or parents vent their anger or frustration before you speak, remain calm (at least on the exterior) and avoid all knee-jerk responses, show concern rather than anger, always save reprimands for private, and never, ever yell.

Breaux also advises her students to be proactive and get parents involved from the beginning. “The first contact most parents have from a teacher normally happens when their child has done something wrong,” she says. "But teachers need to reach out and establish consistent positive contact right away, to set the tone for future dealings. I tell them to sit down at the end of each day and send home a positive note to the parents of one child. It takes 20 seconds. But imagine being a parent and receiving a note from school that includes a compliment for your child rather than the dreaded report of bad behavior.”

“This is just one of the simple tricks of the trade that none of us learned when we started teaching,” Breaux says. This extra layer of support provided by Breaux to future educators and new teachers is part of the teacher induction program at Nicholls. It is designed to smooth the transition for teacher candidates as they move from being students of teachers to becoming teachers of students.

Breaux spearheaded a similar program when she worked with the Lafourche Parish school system. The program was so successful in reducing the loss of new teachers (from 50 percent to 7 percent in two years) that it was adopted by the state.

"It's much easier to teach the well-behaved, studious child,” Breaux says. "But for children who struggle or have behavior problems, their lives can be literally changed by good teachers. That's when you grasp the amazing impact of being a teacher."
Jill Mabry, a nursing senior from Thibodaux, is clad from head to toe in the trappings of old age. Metal rods lining her jumpsuit restrict bending and stretching, and they make walking difficult. Goggles cloud her vision and gloves make her fingers stiff. With the help of a walker, she shuffles along.

For a healthy 20-something college student, imagining the debilitating pain of arthritis or emphysema or the frustration of failing eyesight isn’t easy. But what an 85-year-old patient of this young nursing graduate has trouble imagining is that this spry nurse will ever understand how he feels in his aging body.

Empathy, not sympathy

But how do you teach a 20-year-old what it’s like to be 85? It turns out the key can be found in familiar adages such as empathy, not sympathy, and taking a walk in someone else’s shoes.

“Try putting on old age gear. It’s not unusual for nurses to walk into a clinic or a hospital and treat several 80- and 90-year-old patients. People are living longer; so elder care is a critical need — not just in geriatrics departments but across the board in nursing,” Mabry says.

Mabry is trying out new equipment in the nursing department that enables students to experience for themselves the difficulties of aging. They use walkers and canes, try to read pill bottles and hospital discharge instructions while wearing vision-distorting glasses, dress in physical limitation suits that simulate the joint stiffness of arthritis and put on empathy gloves that conjoin up the shortness of breath associated with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

“I’ve always worked with elderly patients,” Mabry says, “so I’m really excited about this new program. I hear other nurses refer to elderly patients as ‘ma-maw’ and ‘pa-paw’ and complain about working with them. I hope this changes the way nurses think.” A licensed practical nurse at St. Anne General Hospital in Raceland, Mabry is back at school to earn a bachelor’s degree and become a registered nurse.

“I love old people.”

“When nurses are urging elderly patients to eat ‘just one more bite’ of their meal, that patient may be too busy just fighting for air in their lungs,” says Amanda Eymard, assistant professor of nursing. Eymard wrote the grant that made possible $23,545 of simulation equipment. “It’s important that nursing students learn patience and understand the ailments of elderly patients, she says. Students at all levels of the curriculum, from freshmen to seniors in their clinicals, will use this equipment. Eymard is also setting up demonstrations with local hospitals for veteran nurses. At one local hospital alone, 45 percent of the patients are 65 years or older, she says.

“I love old people. I want to pass my love and passion along to my students,” she says. “Many nurses think of older patients as nagging or complaining, that they won’t even imagine. It’s hard to take your medicine properly if you can’t read the bottle or even open the cap.

“Many nurses think of older patients as nagging or complaining, that they won’t even imagine. It’s hard to take your medicine properly if you can’t read the bottle or even open the cap. This should open everyone’s eyes,” she says, “so the courage so many of our patients show every day in the face of such challenges.”

Tips on dating, coping with stress and finding the best cheap food in town haven’t been the usual fare for university websites — until now.

Faculty and staff in University College realize that the key to helping freshmen adjust to university life goes way beyond the traditional advice about the right science classes to take.

Students with personal problems usually have academic problems, too, says Carol Blanchard, associate dean and head of the university studies department. The success of students in college often hinges on how they handle homesickness, financial difficulties and their newfound independence. It’s all about their transition from high school to college, she says.

That’s where Nicholls Connection comes in.

Think of it as a university-sponsored MySpace for freshmen. Students have the opportunity to meet and visit with their Nicholls peers, while the university gets to communicate important messages and learn more about students, their opinions and problems.

Nicholls Connection is basically an electronic supplement for University Studies 101, Blanchard says. “There’s so much we don’t get a chance to cover with them, and I know they sometimes hesitate to come to our office and ask questions.”

The college can also post reminders and announcements on a message board.

“Beginning college is a big step, but they should know they’re not alone.”
ONE MAN, TWO STARS, MANY HATS

By Matt Gresham

Everything from his close-cropped hair to the polish on his shoes and the sharp crease in his slacks says career military … but he has a true gift for storytelling and the kind of good ol’ boy charm and humor that draws people to him like bees to honey.

He’s been a soldier, a farmer, a salesman, an oilfield roustabout, a school bus driver … and an attorney, a state representative, Louisiana’s Speaker of the House, a two-star brigadier general, assistant adjutant general of the Louisiana Army National Guard and legislative director for Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco.

Everyone knows him … but few know the private family man who’s been married to the same woman for 30 years.

To put it simply, Hunt Downer might be considered a complicated man.
Opening doors

Doors have played a recurring role throughout Downer’s life. He saw a lot of closed ones, but that just sent him searching for ones he could open.

After graduating from Terrebonne High School in 1964, he went to Louisiana State University on an agriculture scholarship from 4-H. But, as he puts it, “I was such an outstanding student, I was given a semester off to think about my future.” Slam.

Next door. A brief stint in the oilfield convinced him that he needed to head back to the books for a degree. And there was Nicholls, located practically in his backyard.

In 1968, armed with a degree in agriculture from Nicholls, Downer next tried his hand at soldiering. He wanted to be an Air Force pilot, but the Air Force shot that down and offered him a slot as a navigator. Slam.

Undaunted, Downer instead enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves and was assigned to the Corps of Engineers. He proved to be a much better soldier than a student.

After basic and advanced training, he gave school another shot, this time at Loyola University for a law degree.

“Thanks to the late Sen. Harvey Peltier, I got into Loyola. It’s pretty tough to get into law school when you have a degree in agriculture,” he says.

That’s when things really took off for Downer.

Following a six-year break from military service, he switched to the Louisiana Army National Guard and put his law degree to use as a judge advocate. The military took him to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield and, eventually, to the No. 2 spot in the Louisiana National Guard as assistant adjutant general. He is currently overseeing the $200 million reconstruction of historic Jackson Barracks – the headquarters of the Louisiana National Guard – which suffered severe flooding in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

“I like being with soldiers. I’ve been with them for a total of 34 years, and now I serve with sons and daughters of my old friends,” he says.

Out of the frying pan into the fire: Politics

Downer’s affable manner and strict moral code served him well in another combat zone – Louisiana politics. His constituents loved his straightforward style, while his opponents soon learned not to take him lightly.

In 1976 he began the first of seven terms in the Louisiana Legislature. Along the way, he was Speaker Pro Tempore and Speaker of the House, and, in 2003, launched a gubernatorial campaign, finishing sixth in a crowded field. In 2004, the governor appointed him Louisiana’s inaugural secretary of veterans affairs.

While speaker, Downer transformed the House into one of the most technologically advanced legislative bodies in the country and made the legislative process accessible to citizens through the Internet, public television and committees that traveled the state. He was also one of the driving forces behind ethics reform.

Known as a consensus-builder among legislators, he served as lead author of landmark legislation to create a trust fund for education with the bulk of Louisiana’s tobacco settlement money and was instrumental in creating Louisiana’s Rainy Day Trust Fund and passing the School Accountability Act.

In naming him one of its Top 10 Public Officials of the Year in 1997 (a first for a Louisiana resident), Governing magazine credited his efforts to bring professionalism and ethics to the House: “The Louisiana House isn’t what it might be, but it isn’t what it was.”

‘I owe a lot to Nicholls’

Downer has come a long way from that college senior who drove a school bus while students played pedro in the rear seats.

“Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be doing what I am doing today,” he says. “I guess the Lord has a plan.”

Attending Nicholls gave him the chance to go to college and still work and live at home. It also prepared him for the long road ahead.

“My instructors were hands-on,” he says. “I was young and wasn’t a stellar student. I found it difficult to balance academics and a social life. But I learned to manage my time, which helped me in law school.”

For that, Downer considers Nicholls part of his family today, and returns often to speak to students. “I thoroughly enjoyed my days at Nicholls,” he says. “I was involved in student government and served in the Student Senate. I became lifelong friends with many people through student activities, such as Phi Kappa Theta, the Ag Club and numerous other organizations. That involvement prepared me for law school and a career in the political arena.”

Louisiana has to continue investing in education, he says. If not for Nicholls, he and others like him might never have had the chance to come so far.

“You can accomplish anything you want to in life, as long as you are willing to help others, work hard and apply yourself,” he said.

Maybe Downer’s not so complicated after all, he just follows a simple recipe of hard work and a call to serve.

Metaphorically and literally, Nicholls is leveling the playing field for its athletes with $1.6 million in facility upgrades.

If looking good is feeling good, Nicholls athletes must feel like a million bucks as they take to their playing fields and courts.

Never before have the sports facilities at Nicholls had it so good. Improvements have brought new playing surfaces, seating and a return of that celebrated Colonel pride.

Fans and community and corporate sponsors are stepping up in record numbers to help put the Colonels on even footing with other NCAA Division I institutions. Their donations covered much of the tab for the improvements.

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Next door. A brief stint in the oilfield convinced him that he needed to head back to the books for a degree. And there was Nicholls, located practically in his backyard.

In 1968, armed with a degree in agriculture from Nicholls, Downer next tried his hand at soldiering. He wanted to be an Air Force pilot, but the Air Force shot that down and offered him a slot as a navigator. Slam.

Undaunted, Downer instead enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves and was assigned to the Corps of Engineers. He proved to be a much better soldier than a student.

After basic and advanced training, he gave school another shot, this time at Loyola University for a law degree.

“Thanks to the late Sen. Harvey Peltier, I got into Loyola. It’s pretty tough to get into law school when you have a degree in agriculture,” he says.

That’s when things really took off for Downer.

Following a six-year break from military service, he switched to the Louisiana Army National Guard and put his law degree to use as a judge advocate. The military took him to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield and, eventually, to the No. 2 spot in the Louisiana National Guard as assistant adjutant general. He is currently overseeing the $200 million reconstruction of historic Jackson Barracks – the headquarters of the Louisiana National Guard – which suffered severe flooding in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

“I like being with soldiers. I’ve been with them for a total of 34 years, and now I serve with sons and daughters of my old friends,” he says.

Out of the frying pan into the fire: Politics

Downer’s affable manner and strict moral code served him well in another combat zone – Louisiana politics. His constituents loved his straightforward style, while his opponents soon learned not to take him lightly.

In 1976 he began the first of seven terms in the Louisiana Legislature. Along the way, he was Speaker Pro Tempore and Speaker of the House, and, in 2003, launched a gubernatorial campaign, finishing sixth in a crowded field. In 2004, the governor appointed him Louisiana’s inaugural secretary of veterans affairs.

While speaker, Downer transformed the House into one of the most technologically advanced legislative bodies in the country and made the legislative process accessible to citizens through the Internet, public television and committees that traveled the state. He was also one of the driving forces behind ethics reform.

Known as a consensus-builder among legislators, he served as lead author of landmark legislation to create a trust fund for education with the bulk of Louisiana’s tobacco settlement money and was instrumental in creating Louisiana’s Rainy Day Trust Fund and passing the School Accountability Act.

In naming him one of its Top 10 Public Officials of the Year in 1997 (a first for a Louisiana resident), Governing magazine credited his efforts to bring professionalism and ethics to the House: “The Louisiana House isn’t what it might be, but it isn’t what it was.”

‘I owe a lot to Nicholls’

Downer has come a long way from that college senior who drove a school bus while students played pedro in the rear seats.

“Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be doing what I am doing today,” he says. “I guess the Lord has a plan.”

Attending Nicholls gave him the chance to go to college and still work and live at home. It also prepared him for the long road ahead.

“My instructors were hands-on,” he says. “I was young and wasn’t a stellar student. I found it difficult to balance academics and a social life. But I learned to manage my time, which helped me in law school.”

For that, Downer considers Nicholls part of his family today, and returns often to speak to students. “I thoroughly enjoyed my days at Nicholls,” he says. “I was involved in student government and served in the Student Senate. I became lifelong friends with many people through student activities, such as Phi Kappa Theta, the Ag Club and numerous other organizations. That involvement prepared me for law school and a career in the political arena.”

Louisiana has to continue investing in education, he says. If not for Nicholls, he and others like him might never have had the chance to come so far.

“You can accomplish anything you want to in life, as long as you are willing to help others, work hard and apply yourself,” he said.

Maybe Downer’s not so complicated after all, he just follows a simple recipe of hard work and a call to serve.

Metaphorically and literally, Nicholls is leveling the playing field for its athletes with $1.6 million in facility upgrades.

If looking good is feeling good, Nicholls athletes must feel like a million bucks as they take to their playing fields and courts.

Never before have the sports facilities at Nicholls had it so good. Improvements have brought new playing surfaces, seating and a return of that celebrated Colonel pride.

Fans and community and corporate sponsors are stepping up in record numbers to help put the Colonels on even footing with other NCAA Division I institutions. Their donations covered much of the tab for the improvements.
The football Colonels can suit up this year knowing their field is ready to host the pros. The AstroTurf GameDay Grass 3D playing surface, valued at $600,000, comes compliments of legendary Saints quarterback Archie Manning and GeneralSports Venue, the new spokesperson and the marketer of AstroTurf. Byron E. Talbot Construction Inc. of Thibodaux graded the field and added a subsurface drainage system, with funding provided by the Nicholls Foundation. The field got a test run in July by Archie, Cooper, Peyton and Eli Manning and more than 1,200 high school prospects who attended the Manning Passing Academy. The field was named Manning Field built by AstroTurf at John L. Guidry Stadium.

Donated labor and materials from Byron E. Talbot Construction Inc. and soil contributed by Ronald Adams Contractors of Thibodaux give Didier Baseball Field a newly leveled and raised surface. Private contributions provided a new sprinkler system, and International Boat Rentals Co. of Lockport and private donors provided new bleachers for a combined total of $65,000 in renovations. Completing the stepped-up look in the fall will be a new brick backstop and protective netting behind home plate. The $150,000 project is the result of a combination of public and private funds.

Players and fans alike are having a whole new softball experience with the addition of a new press box, speaker system, infield and concession stand. Private contributions paid the bills.

The Colonels and Lady Colonels basketball teams got a new hardwood court in Stopher Gym and $250,000 in upgrades to start their 2006-2007 season right. The new floor was paid for by the Federal Emergency Management Agency after the previous flooring was damaged while housing hurricane evacuees. Lining the court are new chairback seats on the north and south sides, provided by private funding and the university.

A new soccer complex is on the way, with the assistance of Mike Fesi, owner and president of Pipeline Construction and Maintenance Inc. of Houma. His donation of labor and much of the materials will give the soccer program a building to house coaches’ offices, locker facilities, meeting rooms and concessions. The project will cost an estimated $400,000, and work is expected to be completed in the fall.
By Brandon Rizzuto

With the sun bearing down on his rapidly dehydrating team and spectators on the brink of uncomfortable sunburns, head tennis coach Jim Hunter seems impervious to the weather. As he exits one of the courts and shuts the gate, a smile cracks his face as he casually jokes with one of the Colonel faithful in the bleachers and then checks on one of his players. Hunter then spouts his signature phrase: “Life is just too serious to take it seriously.”

His simple, to-the-point motto barely hints at the complex man with the history that’s anything but simple.

On the surface, he’s a legendary tennis coach and player. His 370-plus wins as a collegiate head coach and his singles and doubles wins as a player at the 1966 Panama Armed Forces championship are just the public part of Hunter’s life, a mere chapter in the fascinating book that is his life.

The journey began for James Neal “Bull” Stevens in a farmhouse in Wilburton, Okla. “I was born January 4, 1940, I think. There is no actual birth certificate for me to know exactly,” Hunter says. “My family was very poor. They were grape pickers and berry pickers before settling in Oklahoma.”

His birth mother, Emma Stevens, died in childbirth when Hunter was only a year old, and his father, Huey Stevens, could not support the entire family on his dollar-a-day salary building Jesse James State Park.

Hunter’s older brothers and sisters began taking the younger siblings into their homes, but as each one took in a few, Hunter was at the short end of the stick. “I was kind of the odd guy out, so my father put me up for adoption,” Hunter says. “Then I was adopted in Dallas by two of the kindest people ever. My foster father was the nicest man to ever live, and my foster mother was tough on me.”

Once adopted by Dora “Babe” and Will “Archie” Hunter in 1945, he returned to Wilburton only after the death of his brother in 1952. While there, he met with his father for the first time since his adoption. “That was the only time that I remember my father with me. I was alone on the back porch of our old farmhouse where I had been born. He said to me, ‘Ah, Bull, I had so many dreams that didn’t come true,’” Hunter says. “I was only in seventh or eighth grade at the time, and I didn’t understand what he meant until I matured. He was trying to tell me that people have dreams that don’t come true and what do you do with a one-year-old child when all your family and life is destroyed. So when I was in college, I came to understand why he did what he did.”

That was the last time he saw or spoke with Huey. Babe and Archie wanted the best for their son, so they sent Hunter to an ROTC school in Dallas. Hunter obliged them even though he had other plans.

“I was only 13 in the ninth grade I wanted to go to the local high school to play sports. They thought this was foolish, given their upbringing during the Depression,” he says. “I did very well in ROTC, in fact, I was the No. 1-ranked cadet in the University of Texas at Arlington in 1961 and went on to serve 28 years in the Army.”

By the time he was 28 and in his 14th year of service, Hunter was ordered to Vietnam. “Those were the defining years of my life. I was never in my 20s because I was always preparing, getting ready, going to and recovering from Vietnam,” he says. “I remember when my tour was over and I got back to Seattle. I bought four or five pieces of cherry pie because they had real cherries in them. And I bought some milk because it was real. I remember taking a shower when I got back, and letting the water run in my mouth because in Vietnam you couldn’t drink the water. I was just so happy.”

After a day in Seattle and a few discomforting encounters with anti-war activists, Hunter, with a Bronze Star in hand, headed back to Dallas to see his foster parents.

He stayed with the Army, playing tennis and winning tournaments. In 1977, Hunter was nationally ranked by the U.S. Tennis Association, reaching No. 16 in doubles and No. 41 in singles.

**Duty Calls … Again**

**Jim Hunter has answered the call to Vietnam and now to Nicholls tennis.**
His first coaching opportunity came in the late 1970s with Notre Dame's legendary Tom Fallon, who led the Irish to a co-national championship with Tulane in 1959. Fallon had asked Hunter to work with some of his players at the indoor tennis club where he worked.

“That was my first experience with coaching, and it showed me that I knew nothing except how to play,” Hunter says.

Dozens of coaching books and conferences later, he got his break in 1985 with Southeastern Louisiana University. Through six seasons, he led Division I with a 122-19 record. He also earned Gulf South Conference Coach of the Year honors in 1987 and was twice selected Louisiana’s Tennis Coach of the Year. He guided the Lions to No. 28, the team’s highest national ranking in school history.

He retired from coaching in 1990, but resurfaced eight years later to lead the Privaterers of the University of New Orleans to five consecutive winning seasons, a record that stands today as the team’s best. This time he won Coach of the Year honors for the Sun Belt Conference before walking away from tennis for a second retirement. And again he felt drawn back, returning to SLU for a short stint as assistant coach, followed again by another retirement from the game.

With three retirements under his belt and a renewed determination to leave tennis behind him, Hunter appeared to be a retiree. But Nicholls came calling in 2006.

“I was originally supposed to be here a month, and I have been here ever since. Being here at Nicholls is a privilege and an honor. It’s a really beautiful campus that has a lot of great people to go along with it.”

In 2007, Hunter led the women’s tennis team to a 10-9 record overall and a 4-6 mark in conference play with a team comprised entirely of first-year players. The 2007 season marked the first winning record for the Lady Colonels in eight seasons. Their four conference wins were more victories than the team had won in the last seven seasons combined.

The men’s team posted its best overall record, 8-10, since men’s tennis was brought back from its 19-year hiatus.

“There is no place on earth like a college campus,” Hunter says. “Every student has a story, and hearing about where they have been and learning about them and their lives has truly been one of the greatest rewards in coaching.”

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By Brandon Rizzuto

It’s the beginning of yet another softball road trip. After the first movie comes to an end on Big Red’s DVD player, head coach Jenny Parsons opts for a lunch break at the closest and quickest place – Jason’s Deli. All the players order, and now it is assistant athletic trainer Barbara Naquin’s turn.

“I’ll have the turkey sandwich on wheat. Plain, with a Diet Coke,” she says.

“Would you like anything else with that? Some chips, a salad?” the cashier asks.

“No. Just the sandwich,” Naquin replies.

“She gets that everywhere we go. It doesn’t matter if it’s a Mexican restaurant; Barb is going to get a plain turkey sandwich on wheat,” Parsons says to the cashier.

It’s safe to say Naquin has always ordered a turkey sandwich on wheat during the last 26 years of travel with the Nicholls softball team, which stays true to her most defining characteristic: consistency.

The Montegut native and graduate of St. Joseph’s High School has been at Nicholls since she first set foot on the campus in 1971 as a freshman and a member of the softball and volleyball teams.

Head athletic trainers have come and gone, but Naquin has been the university’s only assistant trainer in the position’s 24-year existence.

Besides handling all the day-to-day injuries and rehabilitations for student athletes, she also manages all insurance claims. She averages more than 80 hours a week with her teams during the hectic fall semester.

“I was hired in 1992, and I don’t think that I would have lasted as long as I did if it wasn’t for Barb,” says Gerard White, head of the Nicholls Department of Allied Health Sciences and former Colonels athletic trainer. “She just made life a lot easier for everyone, which is why everyone loves Barb so much.”

Despite her intent to remain anonymous, Naquin’s has a service record that has not gone unnoticed. She made history this year as the first woman honored for lifetime service when she was inducted into the Louisiana Athletic Trainers’ Association Hall of Fame.

“She is truly dedicated to her job; there’s no question about that,” Nicholls athletic trainer Jeff Smith says. “Twice in 2005 she worked two events in the same day on the road. Women’s basketball and softball overlapped, and she was literally in two places at one time, which shows how truly dedicated she is to her job.”

Naquin was honored in 2006 with the Southeastern Athletic Trainers’ Association Backbone Award, as the assistant athletic trainer who is a consummate professional and goes the extra mile. Her avoidance of the limelight kept that honor quiet, but no such luck this time around.

“That is Barb. She is the type of individual who just wants to come in and do the job to the best of her ability and leave it at that. She doesn’t want the recognition or the attention,” White says. “Needless to say, she is honored to have received the hall of fame award, but wanted nothing to do with the ceremony itself, which was in her honor.”

Nicholls hosted the LATA awards ceremony this year. Despite her best efforts to avoid the event and the ensuing attention, Naquin did show up to accept her award. And even though her acceptance speech consisted of only a choked “thank you,” everyone there knew she truly meant it.

A woman of few words and reliable as day and night, Barbara Naquin is the first woman to be inducted into the Louisiana Athletic Trainers’ Association Hall of Fame.
Donations to Nicholls State University and to the Nicholls State University Foundation during the 2006-2007 fiscal year totaled nearly $1.2 million, thanks to a strong Annual Fund mailing effort and this year’s phonathon.

Dr. Rebecca T. Pennington, assistant vice president for development and university relations, said efforts during the past fiscal year resulted in a 5% increase over donations in the previous year.

“For Nicholls for Nicholls continues to grow among our alumni, the faculty and staff, and the many area companies which remain dedicated to the success of the university,” she said.

Following is a list of donors grouped by giving as of June 30, 2007.

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<td>Dr. and Mrs. C. J. Zeringue</td>
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<td>Ms. Danielle M. Zeringue</td>
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<td>Mr. and Mrs. Rhett Zeringue</td>
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<td>Ms. Sonia A. Zeringue</td>
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