As Nicholls State University celebrates its 60th birthday on Sept. 23, 2008, this 60th anniversary issue of Voilà! is dedicated to Dr. Alfred N. Delahaye, professor emeritus of journalism and retired director of publications and public information, whose guidance, computer and “red pen” made this issue a reality.

on the cover
President Stephen Hulbert and his dog, Max

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This year Nicholls State University celebrates 60 years of providing educational opportunities to the Bayou Region. Under the leadership of only four presidents, Nicholls has enjoyed steady and stable progress while maturing into a comprehensive university. As a university family, we are looking forward to honoring our past as we celebrate our future.

This issue of Voilà! portrays the many faces of Nicholls. You will read about faculty, staff, students and alumni who are making a difference in the world around them. I encourage you to read their stories and to join me in thanking them for their many, many contributions to the Nicholls legacy.

I also invite you to take part in as many of our anniversary events as possible. On September 23 (the day in 1948 that Francis T. Nicholls Junior College officially opened its doors) we will have a full day of activities culminated by an evening “monster piano concert” in Talbot Theater. You can access the schedule by going to the university’s Web site, www.nicholls.edu/anniversary. All events, including time and location, will be posted on that Web site.

Finally, I want to extend my sincere appreciation to everyone who has contributed to making Nicholls great. Faculty, staff, students, administrators, alumni, the Nicholls Foundation, boosters and friends of the university: all have helped to define what we are. Because of your support, our past is truly worthy of celebration, and our future shines bright with the promises that only education can make possible.

Happy 60th birthday, Nicholls!

Stephen T. Hulbert
stephen hulbert

President Oversees Five Years of Change and Improvement

by Dr. Rebecca Pennington

The decor is simple, yet elegant. Especially the desk, a stately cherry wood executive's desk with matching credenza.

Items adorning the desk and credenza are few but have been carefully chosen. Neatly stacked copies of recently read favorites: *Ike, The World is Flat, True North* and *Lean Thinking*. A sprinkling of family pictures and a small desk clock atop a bronzed pug (dog) provide insight into their owner.

Of particular interest is the small bust of Abraham Lincoln and the companion inscribed canvas that reads, “My dream is of a place and a time where America will once again be seen as the last best hope on Earth.”

The man sitting behind the desk gives meaning to the items on the desk. Fair skin, fair hair, dancing blue eyes, and the hint of a “Yankee” twang complemented by a bellowing laugh and numerous laugh lines describe Stephen Thompson Hulbert.

He is quick to tell you Lincoln is his hero, reading several books concurrently and walking his dog are among his hobbies, and fulfilling the role of university president is his life. Not so different from Lincoln, Hulbert hopes to be remembered for his leadership during a dynamic period of change in the 60-year history of the university.

The “first face” and fourth president of Nicholls State University is well on his way to accomplishing that goal. “Change” has been Hulbert's mantra, and it can be seen across the campus: new signage, new and upgraded facilities, improved roads and new parking lots. Other, less tangible,
changes include increased enrollment; higher ACT scores for incoming freshmen; athletic, academic and institutional accreditations; and increased funding campus-wide, to name a few.

“Change under Dr. Hulbert’s administration has not only been visual, but also operational,” says Dr. Eugene Dial Jr., vice president for student affairs and enrollment services. “The way Nicholls operates today is totally different than five years ago. Processes are user-friendly, and they focus on the needs of the individual.”

Dial explains that student lines to pay fees were quite long when Hulbert arrived on campus. “Dr. Hulbert saw those lines and looked at me and said ‘this will not happen again!’” By the next year, fall 2004, Dial says that lines were all but eliminated, and students were able to conduct scheduling and most financial aid business on-line at their convenience.

Long lines were not the only problem Hulbert faced after he arrived on campus June 29, 2003, with his wife, Becky, and dog, Max. “No one told me anything about hurricanes,” he says. “Our first day in Thibodaux, we were welcomed by Tropical Storm Bill and campus closure due to the storm’s threat. And, then, two years later came Katrina.”

Hulbert says that his experiences following Hurricane Katrina left an unforgettable impression on both him and his wife and changed their lives. “Providing shelter to thousands of evacuees over the course of several months and interacting with these individuals on a daily basis allowed Becky and me to count our blessings,” he says with a bit of emotion. “It is impossible to measure the magnitude of service Nicholls provided to the community during that difficult time.”

Although much has changed in five years, Hulbert cites the pace of change as frustrating at times. “If I’ve learned anything during my tenure as president of Nicholls, I’ve learned that sometimes I’ve got to step back and listen and let things unfold on their own timeline.” Conversely, he says that his greatest sense of accomplishment has been gained from watching Nicholls change (even if it’s slowly) as a result of interacting with people who are doing the work at a grassroots level.

For example, Hulbert says that acquiring 74 acres of land east of campus was a long and arduous process that caused frustration for all who were involved. However, he explains, the purchase was...
executed as a result of many people in varying capacities working relentlessly over the course of several years.

Michael G. Davis, assistant vice president for administration, is one of those people who work closely with Hulbert to effect change related to capital outlay and facilities. Davis says that Hulbert is inspirational in his approach to change. “He sets a goal, but then lets you come up with the means to accomplish the goal. He trusts the judgment of his subordinates.”

Davis cites campus beautification as an example. “Dr. Hulbert never told me to update and replace signage on campus or to order logo-inscribed trash receptacles, soap dispensers and door mats,” Davis explains. “A committee came up with how to beautify the campus, and he endorsed the plan. Thus, everyone involved was inspired. They took pride in the project as a result of Dr. Hulbert’s management style.”

Change is also synonymous with the daily calendar of the university president. For the most part, Hulbert owns his time in early mornings and late afternoons. However, his activities on any given day vary, depending upon scheduling.

Awake at 6 a.m. with coffee brewed by 6:15 a.m., Hulbert is out the door with Max to walk the campus and visit the greenhouse. “Members of the grounds crew arrive early, and we stop by for a little kibitzing,” Hulbert says. “Max, a.k.a. ‘Fast Max,’ is an icebreaker when it comes to striking up a conversation with folks, especially students.”

“When I walk the campus, the majority of the students have no idea who I am,” Hulbert says. “Most see some old guy walking with a dog. They stop and pet Max, and the conversation begins.”

Hulbert’s first job in higher education was at Nicholls in 1985 as the assistant vice president for student services. He continued as Nicholls special-needs shelter; Sept.-Oct., 2005

Hurricane Katrina evacuees fill Shaver and Stoffer gyms, and Ayo Hall becomes a special-needs shelter; instructional programs continue as Nicholls assists an overall total of about 3,500.

May 11, 2006

$3.2 million bond sale by 501(c)3 corporation conducted to make possible road, drainage, lighting and parking lot improvements, including three new paved lots.

July 6-9, 2006

First annual Manning Passing Academy conducted by Archie, Payton, EA and Cooper Manning for more than 1,000 high school players from across the nation.

Aug. 2006

Major parking lot and street resurfacing projects begin, followed by emergency call stations and new street signs.

Dec. 2006

Renovations and additions begin transforming Galliano Hall into a completely modern food-services facility, the final cost being $55.5 million.

Aug. 2007

Maxine Gardina Charter School opens to 120 dyslexic students in first to eighth grades in $700,000 facilities provided by the Gardina Family Foundation.

$50 million bond sale by 501(c)3 corporation to build three three-story residence halls for $19.4 million, to buy La Maison du Bayou facilities for $16.1 million and to make other improvements with the remaining funds.

Aug. 12, 2007

Manning Passing Academy is first to use new $500,000 AstroTurf installed in Guidry Stadium, at the request of Archie Manning, turf company spokesman; the field is subsequently named for Manning.

July 12, 2007

Nicholls acquires about 74 acres east of the campus at a cost to the state of $4.5 million for 57 acres, but with 17 acres being donated by Acadia Agricultural Holdings LLC.

Oct. 2007

Construction begins on $500,000 women’s soccer facility with almost all of the cost being donated by Mike Feil of Houma and his Pipeline Construction & Maintenance Co.

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I consider the arrival of Dr. Hulbert and me to the Nicholls campus to be of divine design,” former Student Government Association president Olinda Ricard says. “We both arrived on the Nicholls campus in 2003, prior to the fall semester, with the desire to make a positive impact on the lives of others. One of the greatest privileges I had in my service as the president of the SGA was the ability to engage in private monthly meetings with Dr. Hulbert.”

Ricard explains that during these hour-long meetings the conversation ranged from high priority and sensitive issues, such as policies, grievances and diversity, to casual discussions about political views, Colonels athletics and other current events. “During our more serious discussions, Dr. Hulbert never hesitated to jot down notes about specific questions, concerns and suggestions I presented to him, and he often made a point of following up regarding their status within the week,” she says.

On a personal note, Ricard says, “Dr. Hulbert nominated me for the Frank Newman Leadership Award, and although I only made it to the state finals he decided to provide me with a portion of the scholarship funding I would have received if I had won.”

She further explains that, “Dr. Hulbert took time out of his busy schedule to travel with me to attend the Gulf South Summit on Service Learning as I accepted the Outstanding Student Contributor Award, and he often expressed his concern that I was losing sight of my ultimate purpose of being
Dr. Rebecca Pennington is assistant vice president for development and university relations

Voilà!, the magazine of Nicholls State University

at the university (to obtain a degree) and would often make the statement ‘We’ve got to get you to degree.’ As a result, I feel extremely honored to have served as the SGA president during his tenure as president.”

Scanning the ever-changing environment is also an integral part of Hulbert’s daily routine. Upon his return from his early morning campus walk, he drinks coffee while answering pressing e-mails, checking higher education and NCAA list-serves, and reading the Advocate and Times-Picayune. Breakfast and grooming are next, and then arrival at the president’s office between 8 and 8:30.

“Dr. Hulbert is an absolute leader, and his awareness level is unmatched,” says Audrey Dozar, his executive assistant. “His experience is immeasurable, for he worked as an academic officer, a financial officer and a commissioner of higher education during the course of his career. He is a fantastic leader who empowers people to do their jobs, thus affecting positive change.”

Dozar calls Hulbert a listener and communicator. She says he often has coffee with faculty, staff or student groups on campus to hear their suggestions and concerns. “For example, to extend the conversation regarding diversity on campus, Dr. Hulbert met with international faculty members and encouraged them to become mentors to international students,” she explains. “He’s constantly gathering information which results in new programs and improves the services provided to faculty, staff and students.”

Associate Provost Larry Howell echoes Dozar’s sentiments: “Three months after his arrival, Dr. Hulbert appointed me interim vice president for academic affairs for one year and asked me to identify one thing I would like to change during my tenure.” The result was the creation of University College, which has increased our retention rates by 14.6 percent and provided the support and services needed for first-year students to blossom.”

Howell also says that Hulbert understands “the value of the dollar when budgets are tight and the importance of investing those dollars in valuable places.” Since Hulbert’s arrival, the number of university dollars budgeted for scholarships has increased from $888,036 in 2002-2003 to $1.8 million in 2007-2008, and his commitment to funding marketing and recruitment has not wavered. “A lot of presidents would have funneled that money elsewhere,” Howell says.

To sync with the pulse of the campus community, Hulbert says he meets with each of his four vice presidents, the athletics compliance officer, the internal auditor and his Executive Council every other week. He meets with the President’s Cabinet and the SGA president monthly.

Priorities and projects that are constantly changing set the tone for any given day. “During November, March and early April,” Hulbert says, “Becky and I attend a university-related function six to seven nights a week and breakfasts and luncheons four to five times a week. We have no life of our own during that time,” Hulbert says. “However, Becky and I cover all of the events, and we try to balance our choices. If we both go to the same event, someone gets left out.”

Hulbert says no two days are the same: “Hey, how many people get to attend a meeting of the Bond Commission, preside over a United Way luncheon, talk to the University of Louisiana System president about key legislation, return eight to 10 telephone calls, answer dozens of e-mails, sign a stack of documents, listen to stakeholder suggestions and concerns, catch part of a tennis match and softball game, host a donor dinner, answer more e-mails and take Max out for his morning and evening walks – all in one day?”

“The constant change and the ability to effect change,” the president says, “are what make my job worthwhile.”

Future Projects

- Complete replacement over several years of the university’s 14-year-old administrative software programs at a cost of $4.5 million.
- Complete renovation of Beauregard Hall at a cost of the state of about $14.8 million.
- Demolition of four obsolete residence halls – Meade, Long, Zeringue, Millet – and the creation of green space.
- A Phase III electrical upgrade, a state-funded project, to meet the needs of the east side of the campus.
- A total of $23 million for a new recreation center, intramural fields and tennis courts financed by student fees and other sources.
- A complete culinary arts complex at Bowie Road and Hwy. 1, with financing by state and by private sources.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DOUG KEESE
faces of nicholls faculty

stanley coleman
angela hammerli
sumita bhattacharyya
allen alexander
en mao
adrienne bethancourt
enmin zou
luciana soares
james alexander
The Talented, Versatile Dr. Coleman Keeps Drama Alive in Talbot Theater

by Dr. Allen Alexander

Dr. Stanley Coleman first brought his decades of experience as an actor, director, singer and pianist to Nicholls in 1999 to follow in the footsteps of Dr. Mel Berry, professor emeritus of speech and theater.

Since then, Coleman has directed the Nicholls Players in 20 or so productions, including "Our Town," "The Crucible," "Steel Magnolias," "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "You Can't Take It With You."

He instructs students in comic expression, voice modulation, stage presence and much else. During rehearsals in Talbot Theater, Coleman will often tell student actors to "move only with motivation," "project your voice more" or "pick up your cues faster."

A native of Port Arthur, Texas, Coleman grew up in Eunice. At age 6 he impressed churchgoers by reciting the names of the books of the Bible, often while standing on a chair so he could be seen and heard.

"I did recitations and acted in little skits at a very early age," Coleman recalls.

He was thrilled when a toy theater set he had spotted in a catalog arrived: "It came with props and a curtain, and I would stage full-scale productions for my family." When his parents saw him treating steps as though they were a keyboard, they hired a piano teacher who found that he could play by ear.

Coleman majored in theater and took voice and piano lessons at Dillard University. He acted in about a dozen Dillard productions and in a few New Orleans Dashiki Theater presentations. He even played a leading role in a drama at Tulane while enrolled there for one semester.

Coleman then spent 17 years teaching at high schools in Eunice. His high school production of "The Waiting Room" became one of 10 chosen for performance in 1976 at the International Thespian Conference at Ball State University in Indiana.

In 1979, Coleman earned a master's degree from the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now ULL). Then in 1990, he joined the faculty at LSU-Eunice and developed its theater program. When Dr. Olivia Pass of English alerted him to a theater-speech opening at Nicholls, Coleman left Eunice for Thibodaux.

During his second semester at Nicholls, he performed a complete one-man show, "Paul Robeson," by Phillip Hayes Dean. Coleman had previously done a short version of the show in Eunice. Because Robeson had been a famous black actor, singer and Rutgers football hero, Coleman fit the part as a black actor-singer-pianist. At 6-foot-2, Coleman is about the same size as Robeson, but, unlike Robeson, Coleman has never been a lawyer or controversial civil-rights activist known around the world.

Coleman has since repeated "Paul Robeson" at Nicholls, and he has performed it at Bowling Green University in Kentucky, to say nothing of twice at LSU and once in New Mexico.

Most of his acting roles have been in black productions, but he has appeared in more than one production of "The Fantasticks." For several semesters he directed the Nicholls gospel choir for the Division of Music. He also serves as choir director and piano accompanist for area Baptist churches. In 2003 he earned his doctorate in theater from LSU.

Coleman says he is disappointed that the Board of Regents in 1990 abolished
the Nicholls theater major and minor, citing the degree program as duplicative and lacking a high enrollment. But that “strong program” has produced outstanding graduates, Coleman says. Like Mel Berry during the 1990s, Coleman must rely upon actors and backstage crews who generally have not taken any theater courses. He finds adjuncts to build and design sets and usually calls upon his speech colleague, Bernadette Dugas, to handle costuming.

Looking to the future, he says, “I think the possibility exists, given the interests of our current students and the vibrant drama programs in area high schools, to work toward a minor and eventually a major in drama, or perhaps a concentration in performance studies.”

On many opening nights as a director, Coleman comments, “I’m absolutely crazy backstage, making phone calls and tending to unexpected problems.” A spotlight may fail. An actor or a crew member may show up late.

“I even had an actor who threatened to leave on the night of production to go out of town to check on his suicidal girlfriend.” Many years ago he had a cast that drank too much, which caused some members to be sick behind the scenes. Nonetheless, Coleman says, every show he has directed “has met with reasonable success.”

Coleman smilingly recalls strange moments from his theatrical past. In the opening scene of a play in 1974, he had to appear in just boxer shorts and, while he was making his way in the dark from the dressing room toward the stage (the only way possible), houselights came on unexpectedly, and so he was mistaken for a streaker. He also recalls the final scene of a play which required an actress to “strangle” him to death: “Several nights she overdid it, and I was gasping for breath.”

Dr. Alfred Delahaye contributed to this article.
Everyone sees her all around town, riding that bike of hers, multi-colored, hand-knitted scarf blowing in the wind. She’s beaming and peddling to her job of 33 years – teaching health and physical education at Nicholls and coordinating its complex festival of the arts and humanities known as Jubilee. Those are among the many roles played by Angela Hammerli, distinguished service professor of education and Orleans Pitre endowed professor. She is the force behind Jubilee, a choreographer for the Thibodaux Playhouse and chair of the Nicholls artists and lecturers committee. In addition, she develops community dance projects and works with local elementary schools to integrate art into their curricula.

And, as if that’s not enough to keep her busy, in her spare time she hikes, bikes, knits, crochets and teaches ballroom dancing for couples. The 58-year-old, modern-day Renaissance woman leads a life that would leave a younger person exhausted.

A longtime resident of Thibodaux, Hammerli earned her bachelor’s degree from Stephens College in Columbia, Mo., and her master’s from the University of Missouri.

In 1972, wearing a dress she designed and crocheted herself, she married Ed Hammerli at St. Joseph, Mo. They thumbed a ride to St. Louis and then hitchhiked to Chicago, flying from there to Europe. Once overseas, the couple hitchhiked to Amsterdam before visiting Sicily, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey and Hong Kong. The world travelers then settled down for a year in Australia.

After returning in 1975, Hammerli began teaching at Nicholls. “My role model for having a career in education was my father [George Mitchell]. He was the head of the physical education department at Nicholls and had trouble keeping a dance teacher. When my father asked me to teach dance, being a good Catholic daughter, I obeyed.”

Grace Daigs, a former student of Hammerli’s, says, “Angela made our dance class interesting and enjoyable. It’s just her bubbly personality; she has a way of making you feel comfortable.”

In 1997, Hammerli was tasked with coordinating Jubilee, an event the university created to help mark its 50th anniversary. Before Jubilee, Hammerli taught as many as eight classes a semester. Jubilee is so time-consuming, she now teaches only Arts in Education and First Aid each semester.

More than 100,000 people from around the world have attended Jubilee events over the past decade, Hammerli says, never mentioning that she has coordinated it all.

“Angela is such a hard worker and so creative,” says Dr. Alice Pecoraro, retired vice president for academic affairs and co-founder of Jubilee. “Since its inception, Angela has spent countless hours scheduling and organizing a variety of events, writing grants and seeking resources to make Jubilee a gift for the campus and the regional community. We could never thank her enough for ensuring Jubilee’s success.”

As for the future, Hammerli, the mother of two sons, says: “I look forward to retirement one day, but I don’t plan on slowing down anytime soon. I love physical activity; being active makes me feel alive.”
Changing the Teaching of Science
by Farren Clark

An ant can walk across water, and a human can walk a tightrope. Locating the gravitational pull upon various objects is just one of Dr. Sumita Bhattacharyya’s unique concerns as she strives to improve the teaching of science.

The assistant professor of teacher education instructs future teachers in how to motivate students. She may arouse student curiosity about gravity by having students whirl around their heads tennis balls attached to coat hanger wire.

Bhattacharyya’s learner-centered approach to science encourages students to connect what they know to something they can create. “The point is, I want them to think. It’s not like it’s a drive-thru restaurant where you drive up and you get your product. You have to do it.”

One of four recipients of a 2008 Woman of Achievement award, Bhattacharyya wants to make a change. She says that “when I see children aren’t motivated, I want to go teach teachers how to motivate students.” She wants students to take ownership of their learning.

As a fifth-year assistant professor of teacher education some years ago, she thought her education studies were over. After all, she had received two bachelor’s degrees in India and two master’s degrees in the United States and Canada, to say nothing of many certifications.

But the woman who had left the warm climate of Calcutta would ultimately complete a Ph.D. at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and find an avenue to Nicholls in the fall of 2003. She says it reminds her of home in India because of its personal touch – and the climate.

Her international journey from delta to delta had a frigid transition, for it took her early on to Toronto: “Canada was a new place. I didn’t know any people. I didn’t know if I would be able to follow their accent. It was scary when I landed and found out that everybody walks. Nobody’s in cars, and I didn’t know which bus to take.”

During her time at SIU, she married her husband, Janan, who supported her throughout her Ph.D. studies. Bhattacharyya laughs: “He sent me to school without expecting any money from anywhere. He said, ‘Go, I will take care of you. As long as the credit card is there, I have no problem!’”

Although thankful for the support from her husband, Bhattacharyya attributes her academic success to her dissertation adviser. “He provided a great foundation,” Bhattacharyya says. “He gave me all his notes when I started. And now I add my own ingredients, building my teaching on what I learned from him.”

Bhattacharyya has presented papers on her dissertation findings, which focus on creating a field for a project-based approach in learning science. “When I was in Africa, people watched what you did,” she says. “They wanted to know what I did with my students.” She impressed upon her listeners how science teachers who use technology as an instructional tool can become more confident.
The Engaged Mind of Mr. Persistent

by Nicki Boudreaux

Dr. Allen Alexander has known all of his life that he wanted to be a college professor. As a young child growing up in Murfreesboro, Tenn., he knew that his dad enjoyed being an animal science professor at Middle Tennessee State University.

“My dad said he never regretted going to work one day in his life.”

So after completing a bachelor’s degree in English and philosophy at Middle Tennessee, a master’s in English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a doctorate in American literature at Florida State, Alexander began his career teaching English at Nicholls in 1997.

Eleven years later, Alexander is a well-known advocate for student engagement, a Nicholls effort to give students the tools they need to succeed in college and beyond. And he is persistent.

As director of retention and student engagement, Alexander spearheads initiatives which give faculty and staff the skills they need to mentor students, beginning in the first year of college and carrying through their entire college career. He implemented a master adviser workshop series for faculty and staff and also a first-year advising center, which assists students in University College.

Alexander also implemented a first-year advising team of University College faculty who work as liaisons with other academic departments on campus. The university developed a quality enhancement plan (QEP) as part of the reaffirmation of accreditation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

With “l’esprit engagé” – the engaged mind – as its theme, the QEP led to Alexander’s efforts to get faculty and staff deeply involved in the campus experience of students, ranging from advising and critical inquiry to writing and student services.

Alexander sees rewards around every corner, from the awarding of funds by Wal-Mart for an annual academic adviser award to the implementation of a common cultural experience program campus-wide. This program helps faculty and students delve deeper into a common topic across the disciplines.

What Alexander finds most rewarding, however, is what he sees happening with the master adviser workshops, which offer faculty and staff from across campus the opportunity to learn more about advising students according to their various needs. Workshop topics include understanding the needs of nontraditional students and of current-generation students.

Alexander says the response to the workshop offerings has been significant and that he is touched by the number of faculty and staff who have made advising students a priority. More than 138 faculty and staff have completed master adviser training, and many more are in the process.

“I get to work with people all over campus through the adviser workshops,” Alexander says. “I get to see people come together from various departments and to cross disciplinary boundaries to work on advising and engagement. I think it’s a testament to our faculty and staff that we have genuine and nice people here. It’s not like that at many other universities. The environment here is quite remarkable.”

Alexander also engages students in the classroom where he teaches Southern, early American and Louisiana literature.
Making Advances in Information Technology

by Graham Harvey

Nicholls students expect a technological advantage when they enter the workforce. To that end, Dr. En Mao of the College of Business Administration proves a valuable resource.

The recipient of the Agnes Candies endowed professorship, Mao promotes computer information systems (CIS) as a critical skill that all students must learn.

Currently there is a dearth of properly prepared personnel in the United States, she says – meaning CIS-trained students have an abundance of excellent career opportunities from which to choose. Of the top 10 fastest growing jobs in America, four are in information technology, a fact, she says, which should dispel the myth that all such positions are being swallowed up by outsourcing.

“It’s a wide-open field,” she says, adding that most every profession requires some sort of information technology, as well as the personnel to operate it. “The purpose is to help people do things better using technology. Whether it’s preparing personal taxes or maintaining an employee database, the goal is to help people to be more effective, more efficient.”

Mao’s journey to Thibodaux is nothing short of a travelogue. She was born and schooled in the city of Hefei in China’s Anhui province. Her family actually hails from the Jiang Su province, her father’s birthplace, and thus the traditional Chinese answer to the question, “Where are you from?”

With two parents who doubled as physicists, Mao first came to the United States to visit her mother, who was conducting fusion research at the University of Texas in Austin. When her mother returned to China, Mao decided to stay. She graduated from high school in Austin and then earned her bachelor’s degree in business administration from Southern Arkansas University, her MBA from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro and her doctorate in business administration from the University of Memphis.

Later, Mao says, while teaching at the University of Wisconsin, her boyfriend of 12 years told her he wanted to dedicate his efforts to golf. That required them to move to a warmer climate, or “any place south of South Carolina, and so here we are in Thibodaux,” Mao says, smiling.

Since her arrival in August 2006, Mao has supplemented her teaching by conducting research projects on information technology acceptance (the ease with which users accept new technologies) and technology management in China. She says even though international research is extremely challenging, it remains her favorite. “Such research brings an in-depth dimension to my knowledge base and feeds into my teaching.”

Dr. Shawn Mauldin, dean of the College of Business Administration, says Mao’s presence enhances “an already dynamic business college. We are very fortunate to have Dr. Mao on our faculty. She is an extremely talented teacher and researcher who, as a result of her exemplary attributes, was recently awarded a professorship. Dr. Mao joins all of us in the College of Business as we work diligently to ensure that we continue to offer a premier business education program.”

Graham Harvey is a writer/media relations specialist in the Office of University Relations.
DR. ADRIENNE BETHANCOURT, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF NURSING AND A NATIVE COLORADOAN, FELL IN LOVE WITH A "CHARMING CAJUN MAN" AND IN 1978 FOLLOWED HER HEART FROM DENVER TO THIBODAUX.

In spring 2004, she followed her heart once again and organized a group of Nicholls nursing students, nurses, doctors and friends for a weeklong humanitarian medical mission trip to Nicaragua. The trip, part of a service-learning initiative offered by the Nicholls Department of Nursing, was "completely life changing," Bethancourt says.

"The 11 students who made the trip gained amazing hands-on experience," she says. In the most rudimentary setting, from sunup until sundown, the students administered medicine, inoculations and general healthcare to hundreds of people who otherwise would not have had access to medical attention.

Since that inaugural trip, Bethancourt and her students have returned to Central America every year – twice to Nicaragua and once to Guatemala.

"The students are exposed to the challenges and blessings that come only to those who open their hearts to those in need," Bethancourt says. One of the biggest challenges, she says, is the language barrier: "Most of our students don't speak Spanish, and most of the patients don't speak English. We are able to connect with the people through laughter, hugs and eye contact; the language of mutual caring supersedes any language barrier."

"Service-learning projects like Dr. Bethancourt's not only positively influence the students and faculty who participate but the global community as well," says Dr. Sue Westbrook, dean of the College of Nursing and Allied Health. "I am proud of the service-learning opportunities we provide for our students. The lessons they learn will prepare them for careers in the real world. We all expect competent practicing nurses, but we also want caring and compassionate nurses by our side when our health is compromised. The humanitarian service-learning mission trip fosters these attributes."

As to what she enjoys most about the mission trips, Bethancourt says: "Providing medicine to some of the world's poorest people is important work, but I believe the personal connections we make are just as important. We travel to one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere, and we return home a little bit richer, our hearts a little bit fuller."

Bethancourt, armed with a bachelor's degree in nursing from St. Louis University, joined the Nicholls faculty as an instructor in 1987. She earned master's and doctoral degrees in nursing from Louisiana State University Medical Center.

Nursing at Nicholls has grown from 626 students in 1987 to 976 in 2007, and the university has increased its emphasis on service-learning.

In fact, according to the university's strategic plan, by spring 2010 every major degree program will be required to develop some opportunity for service-learning, and so Bethancourt and the Department of Nursing are ahead of schedule.
His Research Menu is Shrimp and Crabs

by Felicia LeDuff Harry

To many south Louisiana residents, shrimp and crabs are menu items, but to Dr. Enmin Zou, associate professor of biological sciences, and some of his students, they are more than just good things to eat. They are excellent models for research on molting, glucose regulation and hypoxia, which occurs in marine animals when insufficient oxygen reaches the tissues.

The research, which has generated numerous papers and presentations, is significant for understanding environmental factors and how they impact the marine animals that are so important as food sources. Some of the environmental factors are caused by the presence of the oil and gas industry in the northern Gulf of Mexico, also important to coastal states.

For research, Zou prefers fiddler crabs and brown shrimp. Although the crabs are only about an inch in diameter and too small for eating, they present the perfect research specimen because their bodies include everything Zou needs for his research on glucose regulation and molting, two of his three major research areas.

The third area involves studying hypoxia in the northern gulf, or the "dead zone," which appears in the warm seasons off the coasts of Texas and Louisiana. Zou and his students are identifying contaminants and their effects on brown shrimp.

Zou, a native of China, has found a home in south Louisiana and at Nicholls, where, over the past seven years, he has brought in more than $750,000 in research funds, primarily grants from the Board of Regents and the Nicholls State University Research Council.

He has guided students through research projects and seen some of them pursue advanced degrees in the medical field. Many of Zou's students have co-authored publications with him, and some have published their own work. Zou has made presentations internationally, including several in his native China.

After earning his doctorate in ecology, evolution and organismal biology from Tulane University in 1999, Zou attended the University of California at Davis for postdoctoral studies and research related to breast cancer. But when he learned of an open position at Nicholls, he saw it as a chance to move back to south Louisiana, a place he had grown fond of during his days at Tulane, even though he knew little of Thibodaux.

The job at Nicholls offered Zou the chance of once again studying crustaceans and the opportunity to teach. Additionally, it meant coming back to a place where he could enjoy his favorite hobbies: fishing and playing basketball with his colleagues at Tulane.
Luciana Soares  

James Alexander  

Teaching and Playing Piano and Strings  

by Rick Reso

With a purposeful but firm stroke, Raquel Coutinho of Brazil draws the horsehair bow across the strings of the violin, the fingers of her left hand moving quickly on the fingerboard. James Alexander, adjunct instructor of music, listens intently and follows the notes on the sheet music in his lap.

Although she is only 19 years old, Coutinho has been studying violin for 16 years. She joined three other students from Brazil and Romania in fall 2007 when the Division of Music began teaching violin and viola.

Coutinho’s early start with the violin is not that unusual, for the other students in the strings program at Nicholls have studied violin from seven to 15 years. They are the type of advanced students needed to help kick off such a new program, Alexander says.

Already a familiar face in Thibodaux for his duos with Dr. Luciana Soares, pianist and assistant professor of music, Alexander was a professional-in-residence who taught violin at Louisiana State University before joining the Nicholls faculty last fall.

“For 10 years I had a clear idea of how I was going to institute a strings program, and I saw a good opportunity to start a program here,” Alexander says.

After graduating from LSU, Alexander continued his studies in New York with violinist Ivan Galamian and later in London with Yfrah Neaman and Edith Vogel, two other violin virtuosos. He spent 12 years in Europe in the Southwest German Philharmonic and in the St. Gallen Symphony Orchestra in Switzerland, and, most recently, he taught master classes in Brazil and Romania.

Alexander auditioned about 30 students interested in continuing their violin studies in the United States; that was while he was on tour with Soares and with the Burle Marx Trio, a group dedicated to performing and recording a wide variety of traditional and contemporary chamber music, especially music of the Americas.

Soares, a winner of many awards in both the United States and her native Brazil, performs frequently as soloist and collaborative pianist, including upcoming stints as a member of the Alexander-Soares Duo. She and Alexander will soon release a CD on Centaur Records featuring five sonatas for violin and piano.

In addition to teaching and performing repertoires ranging from Baroque to contemporary, Soares is devoted to promoting the music of Brazil and has a solo recording, “Brasileira: Piano Music by Brazilian Women,” also available on the Centaur label.

Soares began her musical training in the school of pianist Belkiss Spenziéri Carneiro de Mendonça and was later a student of Caio Pagano at Arizona State University and Mary Ann Stringer at the University of Southern Mississippi, where she earned her doctorate in music.

Dr. Carol Britt, director of the School of Fine Arts, says that Alexander’s new strings program offers a solid complement to the division’s Music Academy, which began offering non-credit, private instruction for students at all levels in brass, woodwinds, percussion, strings and piano last year.

The academy also provides a mechanism for music students to gain experience in teaching, and it offers good, quality instruction, under the supervision of the faculty, for a reasonable fee, Britt says.

In addition, three faculty members have also made themselves available for teaching in the Music Academy, including Soares in piano, Alexander in violin and viola and Cristina Mendoza in brass.
faces
of nicholls

staff

ronald chatagnier
brenda haskins
louise bonin
michael davis
angela alexander
ronald chatagnier

‘Cheyenne’ Works and Works and Works and Works

by Dr. Alfred Delahaye

TELL LONGTIME NICHOLLS FACULTY AND STAFF MEMBERS THAT RONALD Chatagnier is the university’s most dedicated, hardest-working employee, and they will likely say, “Never heard of him.” That’s because everyone knows him as “Cheyenne.” He’s the electrician foreman in the Office of Operations and Maintenance who works about 70 hours a week and rarely takes a lunch break.

Cheyenne, a university employee since February 1988, knows the physical campus. His memory of where electrical, fiber-optic and other buried lines are located is often more accurate than engineering plans and blueprints, Assistant Vice President for Administration Michael Davis says.

Cheyenne helps in any way he can. He unlocks buildings early in the morning for contractors. He changes bulbs and
replaces filters about once a month to keep the 12,288-bulb marquee in front of the campus functioning properly. He’s sometimes high in the air on weekends changing streetlights, something that must be done when few cars and pedestrians are around. “I go through about 40 lights a month, plus building lights on the outside,” he explains.

“He’s just a likeable guy who can do almost anything, and he doesn’t know how to say no,” says Jo Ann Faslund, who retired in January as maintenance secretary. She says he will try to solve problems before calling a specialist or a contractor. More than once he has gotten a stalled Talbot Hall lift back into operation.

Davis thinks of Cheyenne as the Energizer bunny who keeps going and going: “If you tell him to stay home, take time off, he comes anyway. I’ve never seen anyone who works so hard and eats so little. He doesn’t know how to sit down and relax. He’s got to be doing.” Usually there will be a tight-lipped smile under his old Entergy cap.

For lunch Cheyenne eats a banana, maybe an apple. “I’ve always been that way,” he says. “I was always playing when I was a child, and I never had time to stop and eat.” But he says he does eat “healthy stuff” and mentions salads, fruit, green tea and vitamins.

He enjoys working from about 5 a.m. to about 5 p.m. “If I have a job to do, I want to do it and get it over with, because you never know what to expect the next day.” His wife and others may call him a workaholic, but, he says, “if something has to be done I will get it done. I take pride in what I do, and I want it done right.”

Cheyenne, who is 64 and the father of a daughter and two sons living in Thibodaux, says he prefers to put in long hours rather than see fellow workers pile up lots of compensatory time but hardly ever takes it.

His father introduced him to electrical work. When Cheyenne was in the eighth grade, he explains, “work got slow for Daddy, so I quit school and went to work.” At about age 14 Cheyenne was crawling under houses and into attics to help his dad. Before long he was an electrician working for contractors. He was big for his age and, he admits, he may have been violating a law. “You didn’t need a license until the 1970s,” he recalls, “and as long as the contractor had a license you could work.”

Mud on his boots and pants is not unusual because he has to get under buildings about as often as he has to get into attics. When Katrina evacuees first arrived at Nicholls, Cheyenne and the four men he supervises assisted in providing temporary power and illumination, refueling generators and helping in other ways. Immediately after Hurricane Rita, he and three other maintenance workers voluntarily spent two days at McNeese State University checking for electrical and structural damage.

Davis says Cheyenne’s talents and efforts go beyond electrical matters. Cheyenne helps the Manning Passing Academy each summer. He remembers being among many maintenance and grounds workers who frequently covered and uncovered the football field when the New Orleans Saints were on campus. “The academy is a piece of cake compared to the Saints,” Cheyenne comments.

In about 1998, Cheyenne alerted university officials to the inadequacies and dangers of the Nicholls electrical system, and so the state spent about $2.5 million on two campus-wide upgrades that took Nicholls, as he said at the time, “from electrical hell to electrical paradise.”

He looks forward to Phase III, which, he says, will cost about $2.6 million and meet the increasing needs on the east side of the campus. “And we’ll be on the hospital circuit, the first line to come up after a hurricane,” he says happily.

Cheyenne knows the campus so well that he often assists contractors and state inspectors when they show up. For instance, twice a year he will guide inspectors to the 14 ventilation hoods in academic buildings and the six in the residence halls.

He is known as Cheyenne “because when I was in about the sixth grade, I used to be an Indian when we played cowboys and Indians, and they started calling me Cheyenne because of that TV show – and the name stuck.” (By 1957, “Cheyenne,” a western starring Clint Walker, was No. 1 on television.)

As long as his health holds up, Cheyenne has no plans for retirement. He likes students, faculty and staff and enjoys trying to make their lives “more pleasurable.” And although he’s known as a workaholic, he says he nonetheless likes to watch old western movies.

Once in a while he will go fishing, never catching anything, probably because he often doesn’t bother to bait the hook. “I go out there with my six-pack of beer [Coors Light],” he says, “and sit on an upside-down plastic bucket – five gallons – and that’s how I relax.” (He doesn’t mention Kingsboro filtered cigarettes, which he carries in his shirt pocket along with an electricity tester, a little notebook, an ink pen and Wal-Mart reading glasses.)

Breaking his broad smile, he advises: “Be happy. That’s what life’s all about.”
brenda haskins

Director Oversees Food, Housing and Much Else

by Rick Reso

The large umbrella unit known as auxiliary services covers the gamut: housing operations, dining services, Colonel Card operations, the on-campus post office, the bookstore, continuing education and the Student Union.

Yet Brenda Haskins, executive director of auxiliary services, sees herself as a detail-oriented person who gets asked to be on a lot of committees “because folks know I will pay attention to details and get the job done.”

Her work ethic traces back to her upbringing on a cattle ranch and wheat farm in Wakita, Okla., 13 miles from the Kansas border. A family farm required a seven-day work ethic, she explains. “In the summers,” she recalls, “I made money driving combines, tractors and trucks for neighboring farms.”

A graduate of Oklahoma State University, Haskins arrived at Nicholls on Aug. 25, 1983, as director of food services. For years her goal and her dream was a modern and efficient cafeteria for Nicholls. And so she was delighted when $5.5 million in cafeteria renovations were completed last year. Financing by a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation made it all possible once it sold bonds based on revenues the cafeteria generates. She contrasts her cafeteria budget of $1.8 million 25 years ago with the $10 million of last year.

And she oversaw, some years ago, the transition from a mom-and-pop Student Union food operation to one that now includes Godfather’s Pizza, Chick-fil-A, Selona Grill and Jazzman’s coffee. Today there is a convenience store and Subconnection in La Maison du Bayou apartments and a Café à la Cart in Powell Hall. Before long, the university police will relocate to Calecas Hall and their old quarters will become a convenience store. Recreation center plans call for a food outlet as well.

On-campus housing has undergone dramatic changes. Seven three-story La Maison structures featuring luxury apartments opened in 2004, and most were recently renovated. Three three-story residence halls with private and semi-private suites are opening this fall. Old, obsolete dormitories – Meade, Long, Millet and Zeringue halls – will be demolished and replaced by green space. The campus bookstore was renovated last year, with most of the cost paid by Barnes & Noble.

Continuing education, which aggressively targets area youth, offers everything from academic enrichment programs to summer science adventure camps. The Manning Passing Academy has been conducted on campus for four summers.

“Students who live in the residence halls and are active in student organizations also pay attention to their academic careers,” Haskins says. “These students are more successful because of their bonding with other facets of the university.”

Haskins’ efforts over the years have not gone unrewarded. She was the first person to receive the Presidential Award for Professional Staff, and she also has received the Student Affairs Quality Achievement Award, an honorary Alumna Award and, in 2005, the Alumni Federation Marie Fletcher Distinguished Service Award.

In private life, she is Mrs. Eugene Dial, the mother of three adopted children: Chad, 19; Brittany, 18; and Terry, 16. •
louise bonin

‘Do’ Does It for Women’s Athletics

by Norby Chabert

When Louise Bonin first stepped on campus in 1994, Nicholls was a very different university. In fact, its facilities weren’t much different from those of the big high schools where she had coached and visited in her previous 17 years as a Louisiana high school coach. But for the woman known to just about everyone as “Do,” watching and being a part of the many changes at Nicholls is her greatest satisfaction.

“The biggest changes I have observed in my time at Nicholls have been the facility improvements, not just with athletic facilities, but with the university facilities as well,” Bonin says. The programs that Bonin oversees have received their share of much-needed improvements.

A soccer facility is under construction on Audubon Avenue; Stopher Gym, home to women’s volleyball and basketball, has a new court and new chairback seating throughout; and women’s individual team locker rooms have been remodeled. “It has been really exciting for me to watch the positive growth of our campus facilities.”

Given the nickname “Te Deaux” by her mostly French-speaking grandmother, she shortened it to “Do” for the non-Cajuns. (It rhymes with boo.)

“I knew that I would be happy at Nicholls when I had my first interview with former President Donald Ayo,” says Bonin, a New Iberia native who earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Northwestern State University. “‘Te Deaux!’ he said with a big smile. He called me that the first time he saw me and every time since.”

Doing is what “Do” does best. In 1999 she was the first coach in Nicholls women’s basketball history to reach the Southland Conference tournament, an accomplishment she considers her career highlight. Along with her tireless work ethic in the Department of Athletics as senior women’s administrator, Bonin has earned a reputation as someone who can be depended on as an adviser, a confidant and, most importantly, a friend.

“I always tease ‘Do’ and refer to her as my big sister, but in a lot of ways we have that brother-sister relationship,” Athletics Director Rob Bernardi says. “We have a wonderful working relationship built on mutual appreciation for one another, respect and a good deal of trust.”

With retirement right around the corner in the spring of 2010, Bonin is in her final years at Nicholls. “Only four semesters left,” she likes to say. Though she has seen many changes in the Department of Athletics, she says many more are needed.

“For this university and this athletics department, receiving adequate funding will always be a problem,” she says. “If I won the lottery, I would love to give a few million back to Nicholls athletics for a new athletics department building or field house. A lot of problems that we now face would be erased simply from having all of our coaches’ offices and meeting rooms under one roof.”

One thing is certain: If the lottery could be won with a positive attitude and a strong work ethic, Louise Bonin would be the one to “Do” it.
michael davis

Keeping Nicholls Up-to-Date and Running Smoothly

by Felicia LeDuff Harry

When mike davis reports to work at Nicholls, he sees a campus vastly different from the one he saw as a freshman nearly 40 years ago. It's also different from the one he saw when he joined the university staff as a purchasing agent in January 1987.

Now as assistant vice president for administration, Davis takes great pride in Nicholls and its campus. After all, he lettered in baseball at Nicholls and served as 1993-94 Alumni Federation president. He also takes pride in his Vacherie home (circa 1835), which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Davis points out that new construction is especially noticeable along Bowie Road on the east side of the campus. He says current and recent physical plant expansion at Nicholls is the greatest in more than 20 years. He cites an apartment complex, new parking lots, resurfaced streets, the renovated cafeteria and three new residence halls scheduled for completion this fall.

In the pipeline are a student recreation center, an electrical upgrade and the complete transformation of Beauregard Hall into a state-of-the-art science building. Those are a lot of major projects in a relatively short time period.

Davis oversees purchasing, grounds, operations and maintenance, safety and project management. A big part of his job is new construction and building renovations. And there are also beautification projects that brightened the campus with new street and building signs, lampposts and hurricane-proof trash bins bearing the striking red Nicholls "N" logo.

For major projects, Davis is involved from preliminary planning to completion. He says that when La Maison du Bayou, an apartment complex owned and managed by the university, opened in 2004, there had not been any new housing facilities built on campus since 1978.

Beauregard Hall renovation, Davis says, has been in the state's capital-outlay budget since the 1980s. It is expected to cost $14.8 million.

Beauregard Hall will close this fall and then reopen 18 months later. Davis says the building will be completely revamped, from updating the electrical system to creating laboratories for chemistry and biology.

Another big change is coming, Davis says, because as the new residence halls open, old ones are being demolished, creating green spaces. Long, Meade, Millet and Zeringue halls are soon to be history.

Also scheduled to be constructed is a recreation center on recently acquired property east of Bowie Road, with funding from student assessment fees and other sources at a cost of about $23 million.

Davis says all campus improvements represent a team effort – "a great deal of people on campus, all working to come up with the overall design and concepts."

“We feel like we’re building pride here as well,” Davis says. “People are getting excited and want to be involved; we’ve seen an increase in clothing with the Nicholls logo being worn on campus. We’re on the move.”

“We’re not the same university we were 30 years ago.” •
angela
alexander

Upward Bound Gives
Students a Boost

by Farren Clark

“Survival, Then Success,” reads a sticker posted near the desk of Angela Alexander in Meade Hall. In her third year as director of the Upward Bound program, Alexander motivates high school students from low-economic backgrounds to pursue academic excellence beyond earning a diploma.

Students from Lafourche, Terrebonne and Assumption parishes are recruited as early as ninth grade to sharpen their skills in core courses such as English, mathematics, chemistry and computer literacy. During the academic year, they spend 20 Saturdays at local high schools and six weeks in the summer on the Nicholls campus.

Alexander has much to be pleased about in Upward Bound. More than 80 percent of student participants passed all components of the Louisiana Graduate Exit Exam known as GEE-21, which all high school students must pass. That’s just one statistic that has garnered continuing support from the federal government. The U.S. Department of Education approved a $313,000 grant in 2007 that will fund the Nicholls program for four years. “We were excited that President Bush signed the bill to renew our grant,” Alexander, the grant writer, happily says.

During the past six years, 104 of 130 prior participants completed the Upward Bound program, and 55 of the completers either received high school diplomas or were still in school. “Academics is always priority,” Alexander says. “But so many of these kids, in terms of social skills and motivation, need that push.” Assistant Director Shelby Hypolite handles much of the recruiting.

“We still fight that preconceived notion that ‘well, they’ll just finish high school and get a good job,’ ” Alexander says. “We know that there is a limited number of good jobs available without a college degree. And we show them that financial success can be achieved through mental work – and not just physical.”

The program exposes participants to a variety of educational and social experiences, from college tours to a trip to Disney World. For instance, “job shadowing” allows faculty and staff on campus to help in occupational and social development. The program places Upward Bound students in summer jobs that allow them to interact with faculty and staff and thus learn about career possibilities.

One Upward Bound alumnus is Norman Edmonds Jr., a 2004 Nicholls graduate with a B.A. in English, who obtained a law degree from Southern University and currently works as a law clerk in Houma.

“In terms of retention, we don’t have a problem, because the students have fun,” Alexander says. “They want to be here. And they are exposed to people they would not have come in contact with otherwise.”

Recalling her academic journey from student to administrator, Alexander remembers her father, a college graduate, as a motivator. Born and reared in Bastrop, Morehouse Parish, Alexander holds degrees from Spellman College in Atlanta and the University of Louisiana at Monroe – and a Ph.D. in higher education from LSU.

Her first job at Nicholls was as a grant counselor for the Academic Success program in the late 1970s. In addition to her administrative duties, Alexander also teaches two university studies classes.

Farren Clark is an instructor of speech in the Department of Mass Communication.
“In the same way that hard work and determination were the foundation for the success of our past, knowledge and innovation will be the foundation for the success of our future.”

Vic Lafont
President and CEO
South Louisiana Economic Council

Since 1948 Nicholls has provided the Bayou Region with knowledgeable workers who have contributed to the growth of one of the strongest economies in the nation. Learn more about the importance of education to our economy at www.bayouregion.com/education.
faces of nicholls students

daniel adams
tyre leonard
lauren hebert
lardarius webb
hannah urdea-marcus
leslie bourgeois
angele leboeuf
After Serving in Iraq, Sgt. Adams Aspires to Medical Career

by Stephen Hermann

Someplace out there something happened to Daniel Adams: the realization that he had come through war tempered and changed from a boy to a man. The National Guardsman and former Nicholls student had seen the worst and “no longer had any reason to complain about anything.”

Now a Nicholls student once again, he’s got a life — and because of the life-changing cauldron known as Iraq, he’s got a goal.

“I had the privilege of seeing doctors help the wounded Americans and Iraqis,” he says. “I thought that they were doing such a great job. And that’s why I’m back at Nicholls. I’m studying pre-med.”

Adams plans to graduate in December. He applied to medical schools during the summer.

Adams says he turned down a promotion to stay in school (he’s still in the Guard) so one day he can help his fellow
We were involved in a firefight, and we lost a Bradley with the crew of seven men when it hit an improvised explosive device.

soldiers as an Army doctor himself.

Right out of Terrebonne High School in 2001, Adams decided to join the Army National Guard in Houma. To grow up, he thought, to mature and pay for college while serving his country. Simple, yet elegant. Young man serves country — his country gives him a leg up.

Back then, Adams knows he won’t be leaving for a few months, so he goes to work on an offshore oil rig.

Then Adams goes to basic training, returns home and next reports to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., where the Army trains him to be a chemical specialist as part of its nuclear-biological-chemical warfare fighting capability. He comes back to Houma to begin college while attached to Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 156th Infantry Regiment, 256th Infantry Brigade — the Black Sheep.

Adams is in his third semester at Nicholls in fall 2003 when his unit is warned that orders will be coming. Afghanistan was one thing – the regular Army and Marines were handling that. But the U.S. invasion of Iraq will take more than regulars to maintain a two-front war. At the start of his fourth semester in spring 2004, the Black Sheep are deployed to Iraq. He resigns from Nicholls and prepares for war.

The Army takes charge of most of that preparation: training in the Mojave Desert in California and weapons and unit preparedness training at Fort Hood, Texas. Adams and others in his unit begin “preparing mentally for the inevitable.”

“We were deployed for 18 months,” Adams explains. “We spent about a year in the Middle East.”

A couple of weeks are spent in Kuwait preparing the unit, getting acclimated and waiting for orders. By December 2004, his Louisiana Guard unit is assigned its first mission: Taji, Iraq. The orders are for the unit to drive as a convoy up to Iraq.

“I was a sergeant E-5 in charge of a Humvee,” Adams says. “I helped man an M-240B machine gun and that’s pretty much where I stayed for the next year.”

In Taji, soldiers – five to a vehicle – spend as long as 12 hours a day on armed patrols. Taji, Adams says, is low-lying farmland, between Baghdad and Fallujah. At that time it is “a hard, dangerous area.”

“We were a mechanized infantry company, supported by Bradley fighting vehicles,” Adams says. “Things were always tough up around Taji but on Jan. 6 we were involved in a firefight, and we lost a Bradley with the crew of seven men when it hit an improvised explosive device (IED).”

Adams recalls seeing at least three IEDs explode and his unit take a lot of small-arms fire, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades.

When the Black Sheep move closer to Baghdad, the mission becomes more police work, Adams says.

“We were patrolling Baghdad International Airport, Route Irish, the road from the city to the airport, in the Green Zone,” he recalls. “Our mission became more ‘people management.’ It’s a heavily traveled road, about seven kilometers long. We also patrolled the neighborhoods that were off the highway.

“It could get bad but I wasn’t so nervous, you know; it keeps you on your toes, keeps your mind on the mission. In that type of situation anything can happen so you really concentrate on what’s going on around you.”

Eventually the mission ends. The unit returns to Louisiana and Adams begins to realize how he has changed. That so much was the same but different.

“I haven’t taken full advantage of the veterans club and services here at Nicholls,” Adams says. “I have friends who are in the Veterans Club, but I haven’t joined. I do get the G.I. Bill to attend school, so I check in with the veterans services here once a month.”

Adams says adjusting from a soldier’s life to one of a student was “a pleasant adjustment,” that it was different being back in school at first — going from one kind of stress to a different type of stress. But, he says, things are working out well since being back from Iraq.

“Part of being a soldier is doing what your country asks of you,” Adams says. “While I was over there I really began to understand how great our county is. I believe I came back matured.

“For my folks it was difficult, but we all got through it. Seeing my family when I got off that plane in Alexandria was pure joy. You’re home, the mission is over and I don’t have reason for complaints ever again. And now … I’m doing OK.”

Stephen Hermann is director of student publications
Opportunities for Leadership Abound

by Graham Harvey

INCOMING NICHOLLS STUDENTS WHO WANT TO STRENGTHEN OR BROADEN their leadership abilities can learn a lot from senior Tye Leonard of Patterson. “There are so many opportunities for aspiring leaders at Nicholls,” the busy chemistry major says. “If in your heart you want to get involved, there are avenues.”

Leonard is president of two organizations – the Nicholls Chemistry Student Society, for which she hopes to secure recognition by the American Chemical Society, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, through which she plans to initiate a secondary school tutoring program. She is also a member of Student Educators and Leaders, a telecounselor in the Office of Admissions and a teller at Whitney National Bank in Morgan City.

A visible up-and-comer, Leonard says she appreciates the university’s support system most of all. New students should not hesitate to try to make their mark as leaders, she says, adding that “people here are willing to help.”

Specifically, Leonard refers to her mentors – April Dupre, instructor of chemistry and adviser for the chemical society, and Becky Durocher, director of admissions and a planner for Nicholls’ annual Multicultural Day, which involves a scholarship program and an awards luncheon for minority high school students. A participant herself while in high school, Leonard has since served more than once as a speaker.

“You won’t be left out in the cold at Nicholls,” she says. “If you are willing to put forth the effort, you will get the backing. Nicholls has a homey atmosphere. You’re not just a face in the crowd here.”

The range of organizations offering leadership opportunities is broad: for example, fraternities and sororities, departmental and scholarly clubs and societies, religious and special interest groups, the Student Government Association and the Student Programming Association.

Leonard says that just as others have helped her, she helps others. As a telecounselor, Leonard calls prospective students to inform them of Nicholls procedures and events. She knows her efforts are fruitful, she says, because whenever the prospects call a second time, they ask for her by name.

Leonard expects to graduate in fall 2009 with a major in chemistry and a minor in mathematics. Her ultimate goal is to become a pharmacist. She would also like someday to serve as superintendent of schools, a position for which her experience as both a student leader and a single mother of a 3-year-old would no doubt be helpful. Of course, she would first need to get credentials in teacher education.

“It’s a question of time management and multitasking,” Leonard says.

The wearer of a seemingly perpetual smile, Leonard encourages other aspiring leaders to get involved, saying there is something for everyone at Nicholls.
**Blindness Makes Learning a Greater Challenge**

**by Crystal Robichaux**

While talking with Lauren Hebert, one would assume she is an average college student. She loves to read, especially mystery and romance novels. She enjoys listening to music, having the television on and spending time with family and friends.

But there’s an aspect of Hebert’s life that sets her apart from other Nicholls students. She is blind.

“I’ve never been able to see what people or anything look like,” Hebert says. “I don’t know what colors look like. My parents describe what colors look like, and when they describe them I can picture them in my mind: ‘Okay, red’s a hot color.’”

Among a student population of nearly 7,000, Hebert is the only totally blind student. Although she says she “goes about her day like everyone else,” being blind nonetheless requires accommodations.

Hebert brings a portable note-taking device to her classes and tries to find a front-row seat. Her sister, Ashley, serves as her sight assistant, relaying information written on the board, opening doors and guiding her around campus.

Hebert was born prematurely, weighing less than two pounds and having less than a 30 percent chance of survival. Blindness is common among premature babies, and Hebert was diagnosed with a potentially blinding eye disorder called retinopathy of pre-maturity a few months after she was born. She says she has no recollection of ever seeing, although doctors believe she could see shadows when she was first born.

A family and consumer sciences junior from Thibodaux, Hebert says she enjoys college and learning. Her methods of learning are unique compared to those of most students. Because her textbooks aren’t available in Braille, Hebert studies by listening to a CD recording of the text.

A disability is defined as a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. About 75 students register with disability services each semester, Rachel Dufrene, administrative assistant in disability services, says. A student with a disability must register with the office in order to receive services such as extended time for taking tests and having a note-taker.

Disability services provides Hebert with a reader to assist her with tests.

She says her instructors have been completely accepting of her disability. When a new semester is approaching, she e-mails her instructors to let them know she is blind and to find out what books they’ll be using. She uses a computer program with talking software.

“I like my professors – they’re really understanding,” Hebert says. “They make sure my tests are given to disability services on time and that I have anything I need, as far as my books go. Everyone is really friendly at Nicholls.”

Although receiving a college education requires extra effort for a student with a disability, Hebert says she knows her hard work will pay off.

“I’m really considering getting my master’s to become a counselor,” Hebert says. “I’d like to be a counselor for people who are blind. Actually, I’d like to be a counselor for everyone.”
lardarius webb

Athlete's Football
Versatility Makes Him a Winner

by Brandon Rizzuto

Less than three minutes into the 2007 football season opener, lardarius Webb walks back inside the Rice University visitors’ locker room ... and waits. Rain floods the field. Lightning becomes severe and officials halt the game.

Division I-Football Bowl Subdivision opponent Rice is favored. But Webb is eager to return to the game – his first as a Colonel after transferring from the University of Southern Mississippi, where he was buried on depth charts and rarely in the starting lineup.

The Colonels lead 14-7 after the 52-minute delay and two quarters of play. Despite another weather interruption lasting over an hour in the third quarter, Webb leads Nicholls to a 16-14 win – the biggest football win in memory – and sets the tone for the season with three interceptions and four kickoff returns.

His three interceptions tie the Nicholls record set by defensive back Chris Thompson during Nicholls’ last victory over a Division I-FBS school (Arkansas State University) in 2002. The Jacksonville Jaguars drafted Thompson in 2004; likewise, Webb enters the radar of several NFL scouts.

“I can’t lie; I do think about the possibility of playing in the NFL one day and how great of an opportunity that would be for me and my family,” Webb says. “But my focus is on this season and helping lead us to a conference championship.”

Webb’s family is in Opelika, Ala., where his love for sports began. His mother was a standout high school basketball player.

Webb’s athleticism first developed on the basketball court, where he guided Beauregard High School to the Alabama 4A State Championship game as a point guard in his senior season in 2004. He was drawn to football solely because of his older brother, Donte.

“If he played basketball, I played basketball; if he played baseball, I played baseball; and when I saw how much he loved football, it made me want that same feeling,” Webb says.

Donte and Lardarius were inseparable until Donte moved to Detroit. Lardarius, in his first semester at the University of Southern Mississippi, learned that his brother had been arrested for a felony. Donte was sentenced to 11 to 20 years in prison – preventing him from ever watching Lardarius play college football, except for one televised game.

“It is heartbreaking to have my brother in there and not with me,” says Webb, who communicates with his brother through letters.

Versatility is what Webb sees as the key to his future. He can assume defensive back, safety, return specialist and quarterback roles on the field. And he is the first NCAA Division-I player to win all three player-of-the-week awards (offense, defense and special team) in a single season.

Touted by various news organizations as a possible first-round 2009 NFL draft pick, Webb was also named a Buck Buchanan Award finalist, Any Given Saturday’s 2008 Preseason National Defensive Player of the Year and a member of four All-American teams. But with one collegiate season left, Webb tries to remain grounded with a team mentality.

“Last season was special; it was just amazing what we accomplished as a team, especially with our win over Rice,” Webb says. “The awards were great, but I am here to win games. And that’s all I want to do.” •
hannah urdea-marcus

From Bucharest to the Bayou

by Graham Harvey

International students who choose to attend Nicholls can expect a highly attentive support network, says Hannah Urdea-Marcus of Bucharest, Romania.

She would have had financial complications had it not been for the specialized help offered by the university: “I was having difficulty finding a method to pay the service fee required of international students.”

Fortunately, Marilyn Gonzalez, assistant director of the Nicholls Office of International Student Services, came to the rescue. She referred the 20-year-old freshman to Western Union, which provides an acceptable payment method about which the international student would not have otherwise known.

Urdea-Marcus says Gonzalez, who also advises the Nicholls International Community organization, is representative of the entire university in her treatment of international students: “I like the fact that students from all over the world, from different cultures and different views, are welcomed here. Nicholls has a very well organized office for international students.”

Pursuing a bachelor’s in music with a concentration in violin, Urdea-Marcus was discovered at her Romanian high school by James Alexander, adjunct instructor of music, who was conducting one of his many master classes in the region. He offered the violinist one of five available slots in the Nicholls music program, which Urdea-Marcus says she gladly accepted.

Nicholls first came to her attention when she spotted a notice for auditions on a bulletin board at her school. Her father accompanied her on her trip to Nicholls.

“We are very happy to have Hannah in our strings program,” Alexander says. “Not only is she excellent academically and musically, but as an international student she has also fully integrated herself into the Nicholls community. She has made new friends, and she is engaged in the university.”

“Hannah has the best smile in the world,” administrative assistant Dana Aucoin says. “She walks into the room and just brightens your day.” Her accent may take a bit of getting used to, but it is no problem, she says. Urdea-Marcus quickly became good friends with the international tennis players on campus, Aucoin adds.

Indeed, Nicholls has welcomed international students for 54 years. One hundred and twenty were enrolled last fall, including 16 from France, nine from Canada, eight from Japan and seven from Vietnam, according to university statistics. In addition, Australia and Brazil each were represented by six students; Jamaica, Romania and South Africa by five each and Kenya and Mexico four each. And more than one student came from China, Finland, Germany, India and the United Kingdom.

Graham Harvey is a writer/media relations specialist in the Office of University Relations

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leslie bourgeois

Javelin Champion is Top Female Student-Athlete

by Kyle Carrier

For Leslie Bourgeois of Raceland, the most intriguing part about her college career is not that she was the 2007 conference champion in the javelin throw, or that she became the first Nicholls female track-and-field athlete to earn the individual title with a dream of qualifying for the U.S. Olympic team.

Instead, it is that she has accomplished so much individually, yet wants only what is best for women’s athletics at Nicholls.

Since she first arrived on campus three years ago, Bourgeois says she has found herself growing as both an athlete and an individual. She credits Nicholls for giving her an opportunity to do what she loves.

“I take a lot of pride in being a student athlete at Nicholls,” Bourgeois says. “It gives me a chance to continue my career and do things I never thought possible. It’s great to be classified as a woman athlete.”

Bourgeois, who came to Nicholls from Central Lafourche High School, enjoys making the most of the opportunity to be a female athlete on campus. In fact, Bourgeois believes women’s athletics can be just as exciting as men’s athletics.

“I feel women’s sports aren’t as popular as men’s sports, but they are equally as exciting,” Bourgeois says. “One of the advantages of playing at Nicholls, being that it’s a smaller school, is that if any team is successful, people will hear about it.”

However, Bourgeois has had no trouble adapting. During her first season at Nicholls, Bourgeois broke the school record in the javelin with a throw of 135 feet, one inch. She also finished seventh in the nation at the 2006 Finish Line USA Junior Outdoor Track and Field Championships.

She continued the success during her sophomore season as she became the Southland Conference champion in the javelin and was the recipient of the Nicholls Female Student-Athlete of the Year award.

While she red-shirted last season to improve herself, Bourgeois is blessed to have accomplished so much.

One of the most enjoyable parts of being a woman athlete for Bourgeois has been the opportunity to help the programs grow and to seek the guidance of those around her.

“It’s obvious that [Women’s Athletics Director] Coach [Louise] Bonin enjoys being involved and helping everyone,” Bourgeois says. “It’s definitely made my experience worth it. Hopefully before I leave here the women’s sports programs can continue that success and draw more interest.”

While Bourgeois has done her part, she doesn’t want to be remembered for what she has done, but instead for how much she has grown and how the women’s athletics program at Nicholls has made her better individually.

“Nicholls has had plenty of successful female athletes since I have been here, and I’m sure many more will come,” she says.
Angèle LeBoeuf Found Her New Life as a College Student in Fall 2005 Overwhelming. After all, it had been almost 20 years since her 1986 Central Lafourche High School graduation. She didn’t realize it at the time, but she was a nontraditional college student, anyone 25 and older. Those students make up 20 percent of the Nicholls student body.

LeBoeuf had earlier owned and sold her own business in Texas before returning in the late 1990s to Raceland to help her family. She also remarried.

At first, she thought she did not fit in with other women students on the campus. To her, they were either younger and in flesh-revealing jeans and carrying schoolbags, or older and in modest pants and pulling school bags with wheels.

“I thought: I’ve got to go get some old, nasty jeans,” LeBoeuf recalls and then laughs. She even considered using a “granny bag.” But with the help of Bonnie Fortson, another nontraditional student, she adjusted.

Now she’s a 40-year-old senior working toward a double major in sociology and history and a double minor in government and English. As a member of the Honors Program, she spent May 2006 studying in Plymouth, England, with students nearly half her age. “That was extremely cool,” she says.

She is also involved in the Nontraditional Women’s Organization, the sociology and law clubs, and Pi Sigma Alpha national political science honor society. She works in the Office of Computer Services.

The death of her grandmother, whom LeBoeuf had cared for, caused her to reconsider her life plans. “I thought that instead of being a useless lump of clay, wasting oxygen, that I would actually get an education,” LeBoeuf says.

Her family supported her decision, but her husband didn’t, knowing that college would require her to spend less time with him. She enrolled at Nicholls and found it bewildering at first. Among the challenges was writing papers that required critical thinking skills. Learning how to analyze things critically has been tough, she says.

She persists in Chemistry 105, a course for science majors, which she does not need. “It has obviously stretched my brain because this is the third time I’m taking it,” she said last spring.

The biggest negative about being a college student, she says, is that she cannot always prepare dinner for her husband and help her family out as much as she would like. A big plus is having college friends who are younger and older than she is and spending time with them.

LeBoeuf expects to earn two degrees in the spring of 2009. She is considering a master’s degree in non-profit management and a doctorate in globalization and even teaching at the college level. She credits Dr. Paul Wilson and Dr. Joshua Stockley of history and social sciences with influencing her to teach.

LeBoeuf, one of more than a thousand nontraditional students at Nicholls, says, “I sometimes think: ‘Look at me, Grandma. I’m in Honors [and] I have a 3.6 [grade-point average]. I think she’d be proud.”
Join us Saturday, Nov. 1, as we honor the Class of 1958 and celebrate Homecoming 2008! Come experience the “Nightmare in Colonel Country” when Nicholls hosts the University of Central Arkansas Bears.

Homecoming Preview

Friday, Oct. 31:
• Golf Tournament at the Bayou Country Club

Saturday, Nov. 1:
• 8 a.m. Tennis Tournament • 10 a.m. Parade • 3:30 p.m. Buffet and Pep Rally • 6:30 p.m. Football Game

Additional information about Homecoming 2008, including the Homecoming T-shirt design, will be sent to dues-paying alumni and also will be available on our Web site: www.nichollsalumni.org.

What’s New with You?

Do you have news to share—a new job, milestone, achievement, wedding, baby or recent move? We want to know about it—and share it with your Nicholls friends in the Colonel Notes section of the Alumni Federation’s magazine, The Colonel.

Please complete this form and return it to the address below.

Name ___________________________________________________________________________________________________
Home Address ____________________________________________________________________________________________
City _______________________________________________ State___________________ Zip Code _____________________
Nicholls Major ________________________________________________________ Graduation Year _____________________
Home Phone _______________________________________ Other Phone __________________________________________
E-mail Address ___________________________________________________________________________________________
Employer __________________________________________ Job Title ______________________________________________
Spouse’s Name _____________________________________ Maiden Name _________________________________________
Spouse’s Nicholls Graduation Year and Major __________________________________________________________________
Accomplishments _________________________________________________________________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________________________________________

All submissions are subject to editing.

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faces of nicholls

alumni

billy tauzin

jeffrey rau

marilyn gonzales

vicki romero briggs
billy tauzin

‘Country Boy’ Politician Still Likes to Talk

by Dr. Alfred Delahaye

For someone who started out in politics “quite accidentally” by being elected president of his class in his sophomore year in high school, Billy Tauzin has made a remarkable record for himself.

– The Nicholls Worth, Feb. 6, 1964

House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Billy Tauzin found a sure-fire way this week to get a lot of television coverage: He had network news executives grovel at a hearing over the failure of their Election Night coverage.


Wilbert Joseph Tauzin II, long identified with the Louisiana Legislature (eight years) and Congress (24 years), is by far the best known of Nicholls’ 38,000 or so degree holders. And he continues to be widely known, for, as head of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, he conducts a Sunday TV talk show called “Sharing Miracles” during which he interviews guests ranging from former presidential press secretary Tony Snow to talk-show host Montel Williams.

Tauzin’s prominence began at Thibodaux High where he was student council president and continued at Nicholls where he was profiled under this headline: “‘Country Boy’ Tauzin is scholar, politician.”

Recalling his student days at Nicholls, Tauzin cites diving into Bayou Lafourche to set up a finish line for the 1962 pirogue races and, not being a good swimmer, narrowly escaping “a brush with death.” He remembers escorting around the campus the first black students ever to enter Nicholls and seeing everything go smoothly. He remembers politics becoming especially important to him when he and fellow students, stunned and grieving, watched TV news reports in the temporary student union after President Kennedy was shot.

He also remembers being a founding member of the Tri-Parish Democratic Organization, which helped Harvey A. Peltier Jr. replace A.O. Rappelet as state senator. “We did it for Nicholls,” Tauzin says. Thanks to Peltier, Tauzin later served as a legislative aide until 1967 when he passed the state bar exam. Then came the Legislature, Congress, a switch to the Republican Party, chairmanships of “powerful” House committees and leadership of what pundits call “the pharmaceuticals industry.”

That was in accord with a 1964 Nicholls Worth prophecy: “Billy can boast of a past which would recommend him for almost any road he will take.” He was quoted at the time as having a requisite for politics: “I like to talk.”
The campus newspaper and yearbook document Tauzin’s student activities. He was a prize-winning writer. He was Hamlet in the Shakespearean drama that had a six-performance run. He was a yearbook ad salesman and often a 4.0 student. He was the answer to a riddle which constituted the 1962 “guess who’s Santa” contest. At an assembly, President Charles C. Elkins unmasked Tauzin once he climbed to the stage in a padded Santa suit; minutes later Elkins announced his retirement plans, and a year later Tauzin represented the student body at Elkins’ funeral in north Louisiana.

As a beginning freshman, Tauzin clowned for upperclassmen by doing a Jerry Lewis routine. He was elected freshman class president, but only after the nullification of an earlier election in which he was not even a candidate. The next year, as president of his sophomore class, he presided over a kangaroo court for the amusement of pajama-clad freshmen who chanted, “We want Squeaky!” That label was short-lived because Tauzin soon became a good speaker. High school guidance counselor Sarah Shufeldt helped to turn him into a public speaker, he says.

Tauzin, a member of the Liberal Party back when the two-party system dominated campus politics, failed to get his party’s nomination for student body vice president. So he ran as an independent, triumphed over the Liberal candidate and went on to serve two terms. He was acting president for about three months when two-term President Ronald Boudreaux, a self-employed family man, took a leave of absence. During those months students approved a self-assessment fee to build a student union.

In 1964 while speaking of Nicholls, Tauzin said, “I think it’s a great place . . . and I’ve profited from it.” He says much the same today. When he and Buddy Roemer were campaigning for governor in about 1987, Roemer said if the state were in a financial crisis he would quickly shut down Nicholls; Tauzin said he would keep it open.

Nicholls may have helped Tauzin, but Tauzin through the years has helped Nicholls in many big and little ways, Vice President Emerita Bonnie Bourg says. The 1964 yearbook staff, in depicting Tauzin as a Hall of Fame inductee, offered this assessment: “The ‘pride of Chackbay’ has a phenomenal memory and a great sense of humor; more than one of his teachers have described him in one word: brilliant.”
Jeffrey Rau

Breaking Family Tradition by Enrolling at Tulane

by Stephanie Detillier

Jeffrey Rau’s hands are prepped for surgery. Steady and agile, from his refined golf grip and swing. Precise and careful, as he skillfully carves a solid mahogany table as a gift to Tulane Medical School. Sterile and coordinated, mimicking techniques learned in a Nicholls laboratory – techniques related to bacteria isolation.

“Doing things with my hands makes me feel alive,” Rau says. He is a 2004 Nicholls pre-medicine biology alumnus. In June, he began his residency in surgery at LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans, although surgery was not part of his initial plans – and neither was Nicholls.

Rau was determined to differentiate himself from his relatives. His father, Frederick (Fritz), and uncles, David and Eric, had attended Nicholls and were practicing surgeons in Houma. His older brothers, Bryan and Jeremy, had graduated from Nicholls in 2001 and 2003, respectively, and had entered medical school.

“My dad never pushed us to go into surgery,” Rau says. But his dad insisted that “if you’re going into medicine, you have to go to Nicholls.” Although he entered Nicholls reluctantly, his timing could not have been better. Nicholls had become the first Louisiana public institution to establish an early acceptance program with Tulane University School of Medicine, and Rau and classmate Michael Prejean became the first Nicholls students to be accepted by Tulane.

Rau was pleased, if only because he would be the first in the family to attend a medical school not named LSU. “Knowing that I was already accepted to Tulane took a lot of pressure off my back,” Rau remembers. His older brothers had had to sit out for about a year before they gained med-school acceptance. Rau liked the idea of Nicholls faculty recommendations carrying a lot of weight, his preference over “looking good on paper” and in a one-hour interview. As an undergraduate, Rau served as Pre-Professional Medical Association president.

In the five years of the Nicholls-Tulane program, 12 Nicholls students have attended Tulane Medical School, including Rau’s younger brother, Nicholas, who is in his third year. Only four Nicholls students may be recommended each year and all must meet high, high standards. “Dr. [Michele] Robichaux’s histology course at Nicholls was twice as hard as the one I had to take at Tulane,” Rau says. “Michael and I didn’t even show up for class, only for exams.”

For eight years, a Rau conducted research for Dr. Marilyn Kilgen, Alcee Fortier and distinguished service professor of biological sciences. Bryan, Jeremy and Jeffrey each trained the next brother in line, including Nicholas, to identify naturally occurring bacteria in oyster samples and validate that pressure-shucked oysters were safe to eat and met FDA standards.

“These boys came in with very little direction and made it possible for me to keep my research going at a level that I could not have kept up myself, especially since I was department head at the time,” Kilgen says.

During his third and fourth years at Tulane, Rau put off his surgery rounds, hoping he’d become interested in anything but the family specialty. That did not happen. Now Rau has passed his determination to be different to his youngest brother, Patrick, a Nicholls business major, who Kilgen predicts will “run the Rau medical empire.” •
marilyn gonzalez

One of More Than 200 Alumni Working at Nicholls

by Nicki Boudreaux

Born in Alaska and raised in Seattle, Marilyn Gonzalez never imagined herself as a small-town kind of girl. She was used to living large: big city, big schools, big everything. Then when romance brought her to Thibodaux and later to Nicholls, she began to delight in the smallness of it all.

Gonzalez is one of more than 220 Nicholls alumni employed by the university in administrative, professional staff and faculty positions.

When Gonzalez first moved to Thibodaux in 1986, she felt alone and out of place. Her husband, a commercial diver who was reared in Miami, was working offshore, and the newlyweds had no family in south Louisiana. In 1987, Gonzalez decided to start taking classes part time at Nicholls in hopes of completing the degree she had started in Seattle. And the rest is history.

“It wasn’t until I started coming to Nicholls part time that it really all connected,” Gonzalez says. “The people here are what make life special. They are unique – warm, friendly, kind. People aren’t like this anywhere else.”

Gonzalez finished a degree in general business in 1993 and then an MBA in 1996. After working for a short time for a small video-production company in Houma, Gonzalez became assistant director for international student admissions in 1998.

“I had always looked at Nicholls as a potential workplace. I had interviewed at some of the large employers in the area, and ultimately decided Nicholls was the best opportunity for me, especially since I had two small children at the time,” Gonzalez says.

In the last 10 years at Nicholls, Gonzalez has touched the lives of hundreds of international students, the most rewarding aspect of her job.

Gonzalez said working toward the MBA allowed her to understand organizational structure and firmly grasp how an organization works. This knowledge helps her to integrate new international students into a new culture, a process Gonzalez experienced herself upon moving from Seattle to Thibodaux.

Today, Gonzalez serves as assistant director for international student services and coordinator of student organizations, a job in which she works with approximately 120 international students and 100 student organizations. Fall 2007 enrollment statistics reported students from 45 countries, ranging from Armenia to Vietnam.

“Working with students, all students, is my favorite part of my job,” she says.

And she believes that the chance to help students is why so many Nicholls graduates return to make their careers at their alma mater.

Today, Nicholls graduates help to keep that Nicholls spirit alive. They serve as instructors in every college on campus. They work in student services. They work in auxiliary services and athletics. They work as department heads, deans and administrators. And they work in admissions, recruiting the Nicholls graduates of the future. Many of whom may make their careers at Nicholls, too.
vicki romero briggs

Thriving in the Corporate World

by Stephanie Detillier

VICKI ROMERO BRIGGS NAVIGATES THE CORPORATE WORLD WITH diligence.

Although most of her counterparts are men, she does not attempt to be “one of the guys.” She refuses to compromise her values, having earned a reputation as an issues management expert.

This September she will also become known as honorary chair of the university’s 60th anniversary celebration.

With no more than her determination and a 1976 Nicholls accounting degree, Briggs has outdone graduates of top-ranked universities to earn the chief executive position at hospitals, healthcare systems and industry consulting agencies for 18 years.

“I’ve accomplished a lot in my career and have stood toe-to-toe with graduates of universities from across the country,” she says.

Briggs began bookkeeping for her father’s agriculture store in Raceland at age 15. Later she enrolled at Nicholls with hopes of becoming a legal secretary – a traditional career path for women in the 1970s. However, after earning an A and tutoring several of her male classmates in Marshall Curtis Kinchen’s Accounting 101 course, Briggs questioned whether she should aspire for more. She enrolled in additional business courses, served as Phi Mu Fraternity treasurer and earned the respect – and favor – of her instructors.

Upon graduation, Briggs moved to Baton Rouge and interviewed for positions at a bank and at Blue Cross of Louisiana. She accepted the auditor position at Blue Cross – solely because it paid $200 a month more than the other – and quickly gained insight into healthcare management and Medicaid/Medicare compliance.

The experience led her to Woman’s Hospital, a 225-bed obstetrics/gynecology hospital in Baton Rouge. By age 35, Briggs had advanced from chief accountant to chief financial officer to chief executive officer.

“Early on at Woman’s Hospital, I saw great things happening, babies being born, and I knew I had taken the right path,” Briggs explains. “It felt good to be in direct connection with doctors and those making a real difference.”

From 1998 to 2007, Briggs worked for Triad Hospitals – first as CEO of Longview Regional Medical Center in Texas, then as CEO of Trinity Medical Center in Birmingham, Ala. In July 2007, Community Health Systems acquired Triad Hospitals, creating what Briggs saw as an opportunity to finally pursue a graduate degree. She resigned as CEO, enrolled in the one-year MBA program at Samford University in Birmingham and accepted healthcare consulting assignments.

“It’s only a short break, though. Briggs is still focused on the future, which she hopes will hold a CEO position at a multiple-hospital healthcare system in a major city. She is also focused on Nicholls students, having donated $100,000 in 2006 to establish scholarships in accounting and nursing.

After climbing the corporate ranks; volunteering hours of non-profit work; and juggling the roles of career woman, wife and mother, Briggs still has vivid college memories: the pipe with vanilla ice cream-scented tobacco smoked by her economics professor, the television she won in a campus raffle and the early class dismissals to watch streakers dash in front of the Student Union.

Stephanie Detillier is a graduate student in journalism at the University of Missouri and a 2006 mass communication graduate.
faces of nicholls

honor roll
Donations to Nicholls State University and to the Nicholls Foundation are still growing. During this past fiscal year, donations grew to over $1.63 million from over 1,700 alumni, friends and corporations.

“Our efforts to create awareness of the university’s need for financial support from our alumni and friends continue to bear fruit,” says Dr. Rebecca T. Pennington, assistant vice president for development and university relations. “Our annual fund effort, supported by fall and spring phonathon appeals, continues to gain new donors to the foundation, which in turn helps our students.”

Following is a list of donors grouped by giving level as of May 1, 2008.

### $10,000 and above

- AT&T Inc.
- Abdon Callais Offshore LLC
- Mr. James H. Alexander
- American Association of Drilling Engineers/New Orleans Chapter
- American Association of Drilling Engineers/Houston Chapter
- American Association of Drilling Engineers/Lafayette Chapter
- Mr. and Mrs. Richard H. Barker III
- Mr. and Mrs. Donald T. “Boysie” Bollinger
- Mr. and Mrs. John A. Brady Jr.
- Mrs. Gloria B. Callais
- Capital One Bank
- Mr. Arlen B. Cenac Jr.
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- Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans Inc.
- The John and Clara Brady Family Foundation
- JPMorgan Chase
- Lady of the Sea General Hospital
- Major Equipment & Remediation
- Dr. and Mrs. Neil J. Maki
- Mr. R. E. “Bob” Miller
- Montco Offshore Inc.
- Nicholls State University Alumni Federation
- Nicholls State University Foundation
- Norm Swanner Big Boy Fund Inc.
- Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin
- Mr. and Mrs. Lee Orgeron
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- Wal-Mart Foundation

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- Allied Shipyard Inc.
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- First American Bank
- Freeport-McMoRan Foundation
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- Otto Candies LLC
- Shell Exploration & Production Co.
- Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government
- Thibodaux Regional Medical Center Auxiliary
- U.S. Bank
- Whitney National Bank

### $2,500 to $4,999

- Agricultural Club of Nicholls State University
- Baton Rouge Area Foundation
- Bayou Junior Women’s Club
- Mr. and Mrs. Kirk R. Bynum
- Byron E. Talbot Contractor Inc.
- C. L. Jack Stelly & Associates Inc.
- Chet Morrison Contractors Inc.
- Coastal Commerce Bank
- Community Bank
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The family of Richard “Dickie” Barker, Nicholls Foundation board member and university alumnus, donated $30,000 to fund a new home for the Executive Master of Business Administration program. The Barker Family Executive Classroom, located at the Theodore “Teddy” Duhé Building in Houma, will accommodate 20 students in a boardroom environment stocked with state-of-the-art teaching tools.

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The American Association of Drilling Engineers awarded the Nicholls petroleum services program $80,000 to create the AADE Computer Simulation and Distance Learning Center, which will provide students access to 32 new computers, industry simulation software and streaming video capabilities. From left are Bob Freeman, executive director of the AADE national board; Johnson “Bubba” Hale, AADE director emeritus and chair of the Industry Advisory Council to the Nicholls petroleum services program; Dr. Carroll J. Falcon, provost and vice president for academic affairs; Dr. Rebecca Pennington, assistant vice president for development and university relations; Dr. Badiollah Asrabadi, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and distinguished service professor of mathematics; and Michael Gautreaux, instructor of safety technology.
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A $15,000 donation from the ConocoPhillips Company will fund a crane-safety simulation package, along with DVD players, projectors and streaming video capabilities, for the petroleum services and safety technology program's computer laboratory in Gouaux Hall. From left are Dr. John Griffin, associate professor of petroleum services; Dr. Rebecca Pennington, assistant vice president for development and university relations; and Ryan Vaccarella, a Houma-based representative of ConocoPhillips and Nicholls alumnus.
A $150,000 service grant from the Southeast Louisiana Area Health Education Center Foundation will allow Dr. John Doucet, associate professor of biological sciences, to conduct a genetics education outreach program for Louisiana's rural communities. Doucet, also the director of the University Honors Program, will establish and direct a Nicholls-based program for Louisiana State University's Center for Acadiana Genetics and Hereditary Health Care. From left are Debi Benoit, director of research and sponsored programs; Dr. Stephen T. Hulbert, university president; Brian P. Jakas, chief executive officer of the Southeast Louisiana Area Health Education Center Foundation; and Gayla Strahan, genetics and hereditary health program director for the Southeast Louisiana Area Health Education Center Foundation.

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The Mary and Al Danos Family Foundation and the Allen and Thelma Danos Family Foundation donated $20,000 to establish the Danos Family Foundation Endowed Scholarship. The need-based scholarship fund will benefit South Lafourche residents. From left are Dr. Stephen T. Hulbert, university president; Allen J. Danos Jr., Nicholls Foundation secretary/treasurer; Alyce Danos, daughter of Allen J. Danos Jr.; and Dr. David Boudreaux, vice president for institutional advancement.
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