MASTER CHEF
Nicholls grad leads critically acclaimed restaurant

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BEYOND THE CLASSROOM
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I am so pleased that you are taking the time to read this year’s Voilà! magazine. It is with great pride that my staff and I present you with some real insights about your university, the great progress we continue to make and the challenges we face going forward. While it is tempting to put greater emphasis on the current challenges, I know that you are already aware of the budget cuts we continue to endure from the state. I assure you that I am much happier focusing on the outstanding work being produced by Nicholls faculty, staff, students and alumni — which is what this magazine celebrates.

If you visit us on campus in the near future, you will notice some remarkable additions. The Harold J. Callais Recreation Center, scheduled to open in early fall, will be a magnificent facility and will enrich campus life. The women’s soccer field house opened Aug. 1, giving our women a complex that they have waited so long for and truly deserve. You will also see the newly renovated auditorium in Powell Hall, equipped with the latest classroom technology, including wireless Internet and hookups for students’ laptops. If you attend a piano recital in the newly named Mary M. Danos Theater, you will hear the performance on one of two Steinway grand pianos, as Nicholls is now officially an All-Steinway School and the only public institution to achieve that designation in Louisiana. And all of this is just what you see on the surface. Below that surface is where Nicholls continues to shine.

Despite the hardships we have endured as a small university serving an important geographical area, our faculty and our staff are working even harder to accomplish our mission. They are taking on greater class loads and additional assignments while demonstrating that they understand the importance of staying positive in the face of adversity. Nicholls is committed to serving our students in the best possible manner that we can, given our limited resources. We remain dedicated to providing high-caliber educational experiences so that our graduates will become valued citizens and go forth to serve their communities and their families.

We know that we have even more challenges to come, but this faculty and this staff will meet them with resolve. We will do everything within our power to see that Nicholls not only survives but also flourishes despite financial obstacles. Through it all, we will continue to take care of every student who comes our way, ensuring that he or she has the highest quality educational opportunity possible. That is what we do best!

Dr. Stephen T. Hulbert

As part of a new employee-focused initiative, a different group of Nicholls faculty and staff is invited to monthly “Bend the President’s Ear” meetings, where they have the chance to ask questions and voice their concerns.
Chinese-Cajun equation

Before she boarded a 20-hour flight to Louisiana, Mi Chen’s only knowledge of the area was the “New Orleans-style” wings served at the KFC restaurant in her hometown of Chongqing, China. But after some initial homesickness, and now with two semesters behind her, Chen has adapted well to American culture, Cajun cuisine and college life at Nicholls. When she’s not watching The Vampire Diaries or listening to Taylor Swift, she’s studying chemistry or working her student job at Ellender Memorial Library.

Chen is one of the first participants in a program that allows students from Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications (CUPT) to finish their chemistry degrees at Nicholls after completing two years at the Chinese university.

“This was a chance for me to go to America and learn a different culture,” says Chen, who has wanted to visit the United States for some time.

There to help Chen and other Chinese students make the cultural transition is associate chemistry professor and China native Yusheng Dou, who began the degree partnership. He helps answer their schoolwork questions and invites them to his home each week for a traditional Chinese meal.

To the soft-spoken, studious Chen, Nicholls’ smaller class sizes and one-on-one attention from professors have stood out the most. They are advantages she couldn’t get at CUPT’s campus of 20,000 students.

The daughter of a Chinese businesswoman and a construction worker, Chen hopes her Nicholls education will help pave the way to a pharmaceutical career. Her ultimate goal is to bring new discoveries or inventions to the world through pharmaceutical research.

“When someone I know says, ‘This is a product my friend Mi Chen made,’ I will be so proud,” she says.

Moving from a southwestern Chinese city of more than 31 million to a southern Louisiana city of fewer than 15,000, Chen finds Thibodaux “peaceful.”

“I like the blue sky, the fresh air, and the sunset is so beautiful,” says Chen, who bikes to campus each day.

In search of the perfect compost

Each semester, Chef John Folse Culinary Institute students go through sacks of potatoes while learning proper knife skills. Wanting to find a good use for food waste, faculty tossed the diced, sliced and minced potatoes into the compost bin outside Gouaux Hall. Before long, though, a strong stench emanated.

They quickly learned that excessive pounds of potatoes don’t yield fertile soil or pleasant smells. But what food scraps are best for composting? Chef Monica Larousse, culinary instructor, is partnering with the Department of Biological Sciences to find out.

Culinary students and faculty now compost their food waste in separate bins: citrus; alliums (onions, garlic, etc.); greens; high-sugar vegetables; whites (egg shells, paper towels, etc.); and coffee and tea. The Starbucks in Thibodaux has also offered to donate its used coffee grounds for the project.

Angie Corbin, instructor of biological sciences, tests the various soil samples to determine what ratio of food scraps produces the best soil for plant growth.

“Getting students to remember to compost their food scraps is sometimes a challenge,” Larousse says. “But it’s becoming the way of life for chefs.”

The farm-to-table movement is having a lasting influence on the culinary industry. To reflect that, the new culinary arts building, expected to open in 2014, will have edible landscaping of fresh herbs, and Larousse hopes to get the community involved by starting a gardening society and hosting community workshops. — Stephanie Detillier
A musical twist to Ellender library

With a new music center housing everything from accordions to xylophones, the once-quiet third floor of Ellender Memorial Library has become a place for visitors to make some noise.

Through grants from the Louisiana Board of Regents and Nicholls, Dr. Melissa Goldsmith, multimedia head and reference librarian, purchased more than 100 instruments for the center, which offers the community an opportunity to play music in a relaxed yet educational environment.

Along with the familiar Cajun triangle and washboard are instruments from around the world such as the Indian sitar, which resembles a guitar, and historical instruments such as the Baroque-era crumhorns, which look like old, curved umbrella handles.

Because the center is not on the second floor, where many students study, the thumping of an Irish drum and rattling of egg shakers are not a disturbance. In fact, they are welcomed sounds.

“We still have people who like to study up here,” Goldsmith says. “There are people who would rather have a piano playing in the background than to be on one of the other quieter floors, where they might hear a conversation.”

Sandi Chauvin, multimedia supervisor and library specialist, has seen one student play the piano during study breaks and another show off his unexpected musical talents.

“You wouldn’t think for a minute that he would play the piano. He was a big, burly guy — I think he was a football player,” she says. “But he played beautifully.”

The center appeals to students and community members who don’t have time to take a music course but want to practice their musical hobby or test out various instruments. Many visitors are quite curious to see the exotic instruments, the ones they’ve only read about.

“Some students start with the familiar Cajun instruments, and then they want to know more about the world instruments,” Goldsmith says. “We’re promoting global education. That, to me, is what a library is about — improving interactions and enriching students’ experiences in college.” — Bridget Mire

The future of drones

To study bird habitats, monitor coastal erosion and even help with post-disaster search and rescue missions, Nicholls researchers are now using drones.

For many, the term brings to mind images of remotely piloted aircraft flying over Afghanistan and Iraq, gaining surveillance and ultimately locating and attacking military targets. But drones, also referred to as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), are now being used for various nonmilitary purposes, such as the monitoring of crops, hurricanes, oil spills, forest fires and crime zones. They provide real-time data in a much cheaper and efficient manner than satellites, piloted planes or helicopters.

In April 2012, Nicholls gained national attention when The Wall Street Journal listed it as one of 61 universities, police departments and other agencies authorized by the Federal Aviation Administration to fly UAVs. But it wasn’t news to Nicholls geomatics students; they’ve been testing the technology for the past four years.

Currently, Nicholls is authorized to fly its 6-foot CyberBug over six barrier islands off Louisiana’s coast. Dr. Balaji Ramachandran, head of the Nicholls Department of Applied Sciences, is working with Crescent Unmanned Systems and Trimble Navigation Ltd. to secure additional, more sophisticated devices for the campus. He compares UAVs to the GPS market. In the 1990s, GPS technology was used exclusively by the military, but after the Department of Defense allowed its commercialization, drivers soon bought up TomTom and Garmin devices.

“GPS now has more civilian than military applications. The same will be true for UAVs,” Ramachandran says. “The U.S. Department of Defense estimates there will be 70 to 80 civilian UAV applications, and about 40 to 50 of them will be applicable to the state of Louisiana.”

It is predicted that by 2015, the FAA will authorize commercial use of UAVs in civilian air space, and Nicholls is primed to capitalize on the market. The university has an ideal coastal location, the only geomatics program in the state and a strong initiative to recruit veterans, who are already familiar with drones.

“After Katrina, there were so many reasons why we should use this technology,” Ramachandran says. “As this becomes an emerging niche market, we intend to be leaders.” — Stephanie Detillier
Slimming down statewide obesity

Louisiana’s oversized portions, deep-fried delicacies and high-calorie snacks please the taste buds, but, oh, how they upset the scales. As the state’s obese population grows, Nicholls is introducing a multifaceted program to help Louisiana shave inches off its expanding waistline.

Health promotion, a new minor in the Department of Allied Health Sciences, combines courses in dietetics, health and physical education, biology, sociology, family and consumer sciences, nursing, psychology and more. “Obesity is such a multifactorial disease process,” says Brigett Scott, department head of allied health sciences. “It’s important that we approach the solution in a similar way.”

The program is designed to attract students from various majors. “Students already majoring in health care-related fields can use this minor to become more versatile and marketable to employers,” Scott says. But even for those not enrolled in health care programs, the minor provides skills applicable in diverse industries.

The program could appeal to marketing students who wish to work for a fitness or nutrition company, culinary majors interested in healthy cooking or future psychologists preparing to address weight-related self-esteem problems.

The new minor was created after the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals asked Nicholls to help address the state’s failing obesity grade. According to the Council on Obesity Prevention and Management, Louisiana has the fifth-highest obesity rate in the country. Alarmingly, almost 65 percent of adults and 48 percent of children ages 2-19 are overweight or obese.

Dr. Allayne Barrilleaux, vice president for academic affairs, says that despite budget constraints, Nicholls faculty are meeting the state’s needs and offering a program that reflects societal trends. “This is a great example of what universities can do to help our state agencies,” she says. “Trends in society are fusing the ideas of food, nutrition and health together. Because we have expertise in these areas, we are able to combine our resources to capitalize on that niche.” — Lee Dangle

Reading Twilight for class credit

On the Quad’s benches and in quiet nooks inside academic halls, Nicholls students can be found devouring The Hunger Games, Twilight and the Harry Potter series. But they aren’t necessarily reading for pleasure. Such contemporary book titles have become required reading for some university composition and literature courses.

In addition to its traditional offerings, the Nicholls Department of Languages and Literature has designed thematic courses on such diverse subjects as the 1960s, baseball literature, Harry Potter, war novels and the Harlem Renaissance. The courses, most of which are sections of English 101 and 102 (composition) and English 210 (literary themes), have the same academic goals and rigor as their traditional counterparts. Their topics, however, appeal specifically to the 21st-century student.

“We’re in good company with these sorts of courses,” says department chair Dr. Ellen Barker. “You’ll find similar curricula at Harvard and Stanford.”

Jenna Portier, for example, teaches a literature course focusing exclusively on Japanese culture. The English instructor says she chose the subject primarily because she has been fascinated with Japan since high school. Her students read and analyze texts including A Robe of Feathers: And Other Stories, Memoirs of a Geisha: A Novel and After Dark.

“The goal of the class is to have students see the world from another society’s point of view,” Portier says. “In a world that is becoming more global by the day, we all need to be more aware of and understanding of other cultures.”

English instructor Marly Robertson has taken her students on various thematic trips through her courses exploring vampires, zombies, the graphic novel, New Orleans culture and post-apocalyptic literature. In her graphic novel course, she puts a hands-on spin to one assignment, having students construct and bind miniature comics into a collection.

“The goals are to get students interested in English while also honing their analytical, critical thinking and writing skills,” Robertson says. “The topics, ideally, will get students interested in literature, even if they have not previously been huge fans of reading.”

Of course, Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton still have their place in many university English classes, and they always will. But for students whose first reading choice isn’t Macbeth, the contemporary courses offer popular alternatives — and might even spark their interest in the classics. — Graham Harvey
We all do it. We rail against stereotyping, but there is one class of individuals seldom protected by our high-mindedness: college professors. We assume that all science professors wear lab coats. Humanities professors wear sports coats with leather elbow patches. Math professors adorn their shirts with pocket protectors.

So if we learn that a particular humanities professor researches *Dracula*, we might still envision him in a sports coat, yet with the tweed oddly spun out of black thread. We might assume that he rarely ventures outside, except after dark, of course. And his interests probably run toward the gothic, with gargoyles doubling as bookends and posters from B-grade horror flicks festooning his office walls.

But Dr. Scott Banville, who has presented and published papers on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, is much more likely to be seen out and about in the bright light of day, doing things that do not quite fit the dark stereotype. He talks with students and colleagues, and as the Cycling Club adviser, he rides his bike 60 to 100 miles a week. In fact, Banville, an assistant professor of English, isn’t even a huge fan of the horror genre. His interest in *Dracula* was piqued while listening to a friend’s presentation on the novel.

“For all the technology used in *Dracula*, there are no cameras,” he says. “That got me thinking … why would Stoker include telegraphs, recording phonographs, typewriters, etc. but no photographs, no cameras? Such omissions are worth thinking about.”

Banville’s paper on the topic, which he presented at the 2011 Louisiana Academy of Sciences conference, weaves together discussions of philosophy, vision and optics. Interestingly, Stoker relied on photo albums to help him write colorful descriptions of Eastern Europe, so why would he purposely omit photography from his novel?

“A photo would have been the one piece of irrefutable hard evidence that Dracula really exists,” Banville says. “By the end of the story, Dracula destroys the phonograph tapes; only notes from those chasing Dracula are left. So you either believe it or you don’t.”

Banville says the novel reflects the Victorian culture’s concerns about whether vision was a reliable source of knowledge. “People began realizing how easily the eye can be tricked and how what we see is often based on our preconceptions and stereotypes,” he says.

And it is those keen observations, likely to escape a less critical eye, that are characteristic of a productive scholar. Here, yet again, Banville debunks stereotypes: Research need not be as ornate, forbidding and inaccessible as Dracula’s castle. Nor as deadly dull as a vampire’s pallor. — Dr. Robert Allen Alexander
Keeping students on track

Tommy Ponson is almost always on call. When his phone rings in the early morning hours or during supper with his family in Gretna, he can hardly predict what the situation might be: a student whose parent has died, a student who’s set off the fire alarm in a residence hall or perhaps a student who’s being held by the police.

As director of judicial affairs and coordinator of student life, Ponson handles the most troubling cases, often working with students who are teetering on the edge of heading down a dark path. Knowing that such responsibility falls squarely on his shoulders keeps him humble, respectful and strong in his faith.

“My faith is the one thing that keeps me grounded and patient,” he says. “It keeps me waking up the next morning loving my life and my job.”

His faith is also what led him to earn his doctoral degree in March 2012 from the Christian Life School of Theology in Columbus, Ga. For his dissertation, he researched how people’s behavioral patterns coincide with their religious beliefs.

“It’s not what you talk; it’s how you walk that affects people,” Ponson says. “Whether you have a religious affiliation or not, that’s life.”

Figuring out how to best help students takes a lot of patience and an open ear. His office coffee pot is often brewing as he tries to figure out what’s behind students’ actions.

“Tommy often gives our students their ‘aha’ moment, where they decide to get with it, stop their foolishness and graduate,” says Brenda Haskins, executive director of auxiliary services.

Perhaps Ponson’s success comes from being able to identify with the students sent his way.

“When I was in school, I had no direction,” says Ponson, who graduated from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. “I was one of those who often sat on the other side of this desk. Let’s just say I helped write the games that are being played today.”

But one random day, Ponson was asked to help coordinate residence hall activities. Because he was there anyway, he decided to join in. That simple decision led him to become a house director at ULL and eventually to join Nicholls in 1998 as assistant director of residential services.

In Ponson’s current role, he also helps guide campus Greek organizations and is active with his own Omega Psi Phi Fraternity alumni chapter. On his time off, he’s the director of finance and music at his church and a member of the Soulful Warriors, the honor guard for the Mardi Gras Krewe of Zulu. But even then, he’s just a phone call away for students. — Stephanie Detillier

Oh, Christmas tree

An odd red and gray 12-foot-tall structure between Ardoyne Drive and Gouaux Hall might strike some observers as modernistic sculpture. But Dean of Arts and Sciences John Doucet knows it’s an oil-patch Christmas tree and talks of stringing lights on it in December.

To Michael Gautreaux, coordinator of petroleum services programs, it’s “a symbol of our region’s culture and economy” and a landmark that tells first-time visitors that they’ve found the offices of petroleum services and safety technology.

To Mike Pemberton and other petroleum services faculty members, it’s a teaching aid that allows students to see and understand the surface safety valve, the crown valve, the adjustable choke and much more. “Students love it,” he says, “and it gives our building character.”

Basically, the Christmas tree is a series of valves and fittings mounted above the wellhead, which allow technicians to control the flow of oil or gas and to make interventions. Gautreaux estimates the original cost at $20,000.

Christian Magar, a former instructor now with Cameron International Inc. of Houston, persuaded the company to donate the functioning wellhead tree assembly and to refurbish, sandblast and paint it in Nicholls colors.

Since the 5,400-pound object’s installation in mid-December 2011, petroleum services instructors have stopped using photos and diagrams to explain the how and why of procedures. Now, they rely upon the real thing. — Dr. Al Delahaye
Can ATMs spread staph?

During her roller derby bouts, Lauren McMahill is known as MediKill, a nod to her part-time paramedic job and medical career aspirations. But around Thibodaux, business owners are more likely to know her as the Nicholls student who asked a most unusual question: Can I swab your ATM?

For her University Honors Program thesis, McMahill collected samples from 55 ATMs to determine if their keypads contained traces of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, commonly known as MRSA.

“MRSA is a big concern for those working in ambulances and hospitals,” says McMahill, who has worked for Acadian Ambulance since 2009. “Compared to other strains of staph, MRSA is harder to treat and requires the most costly drugs and close monitoring of the patient because toxicity from the drug treatment can lead to renal failure. I thought ATMs would be a great way to track the spread of MRSA because they’re such widely used objects.”

Much to her surprise, McMahill found no cases of MRSA and only one ATM containing Staphylococcus aureus, a bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nasal passages that can be easily treated with antibiotics.

The unexpected results didn’t deter McMahill, a senior pre-med major from New York. “It’s exciting never knowing what you’ll stumble upon; a lot of scientific discoveries were accidental,” she says. “Research is dynamic and constantly changing, and it will be the same way in medical school.”

Conducting research while juggling biology courses and a paramedic job was certainly a challenge, but McMahill embraced it. All three responsibilities complemented one another, allowing her to uniquely combine research findings, book knowledge and practical experience. Even joining the Houma-based Cajun Rollergirls has added to her bandaging techniques, and the exercise has helped McMahill, a diabetic, keep her blood sugar under control.

Back in Gouaux Hall’s biology labs, McMahill continues to investigate MRSA’s spread. She has already tested metal, soft plastic and hard plastic ATM keypads and determined that MRSA is capable of growing on all three types. Other factors such as UV lighting or humidity could have prevented MRSA from lurking on Thibodaux’s ATMs.

Another unexpected result of her research has been the opportunity to talk with others about MRSA. Initially, local bank, bar and gas station employees reacted with shock and confusion when she asked to swab their ATMs. Most encouraged her, saying: “Test that thing; it’s really dirty,” or “I bet you’ll find something on there.”

“Quite a few people were really interested in what I was doing,” she says. “They started asking me questions about MRSA and how to prevent it.”

McMahill offered simple, helpful advice: Wash your hands. Especially before eating. And even after making an ATM transaction. — Stephanie Detillier

For her honors thesis, Lauren McMahill, a pre-med senior and part-time paramedic, tested 55 local ATMs for staph infection.
**PHOTOGRAPHIC FASHION**

From a box of old photos and a tacky bridesmaid’s dress, Jacob Jennings created a modernistic, fashion-forward gown. The senior photography major from Thibodaux explains how the unexpected dress came to be.

**The assignment:** Assistant professor Michael Williams dedicates the final two weeks of his beginning sculpture course to a wearable garments assignment. “He’s seen the newspaper and duct tape dresses,” photography student Jacob Jennings says. “He wanted something new and innovative from us.”

**The inspiration:** Going for a dramatic look, Jennings decided on an evening gown with Victorian influences and a contemporary edge. While searching for something cheap that could mimic fabric and cover a lot of space, he stumbled upon an overflowing box of photos. When Jennings first started his own photography business in 2008, he printed out his photo proofs, which clients used to place orders. Over the years, he had accumulated more than 1,000 leftover photos.

**The process:** For the basic structure, Jennings used a bright-orange halter-top bridesmaid’s dress, which he bought from the Bridal Corner in Thibodaux for $5. He ripped seams, hot-glued on extra material and borrowed a hoopskirt his stepmother had worn to her wedding. Once the dress was assembled, he began arranging the photos diagonally. “My professor walked in, looked at what I was doing and said, ‘This is intriguing, but it isn’t going to work.’ The photos were creating a visual texture but not a physical texture.” Jennings began folding his photos in half, creating more curvature and dimension, and he added a bustle to the back. From first sketches to final presentation, he spent about 26 hours creating the dress.

**The finishing details:** For a personal touch, Jennings created earrings using his own senior portraits. He covered high-heeled shoes with photos of Chelsea Reinhardt, a marketing student who agreed to serve as his model. He also added a photo bracelet and a veil made from the leftover paper surrounding die-cut photos. “I’d pick up a Subway sandwich, go to the studio and just look at the dress, trying to figure out what to do next,” Jennings recalls. “For the first time, with something other than photography, I felt really great about what I was creating.” Even the Bridal Corner took notice of his transformation. His dress has been on display in the store window — adding an unexpected, artistic touch to downtown Thibodaux. — Stephanie Detillier
As Cale Guidry walks through campus — with helmet in hand and black tribal tattoos covering his arms — some probably make a quick judgment call on his preferred mode of transportation. But Guidry isn’t hopping onto the back of a motorcycle. Rather, his bike of choice is a light-weight racing bicycle, which he uses to train with the new Nicholls Cycling Club.

The team formed after Dr. Scott Banville, English professor and faculty sponsor, scouted interested students at the university’s 2011 Welcome Back Day. Having raced competitively in grad school, Banville knew the club sport could provide students with a healthy competitive outlet and a unique way to get active.

“Collegiate cycling is competitive but not so competitive that people get put off by it,” Banville says. “It’s a great way to meet other students from across your region or even the country.”

As part of the South Central Cycling Collegiate Conference, the Nicholls team competes against other universities from Louisiana, Texas and Oklahoma. In March, team member Jonathan Comeaux finished fifth in his first collegiate race — the Green Wave Classic at Tulane University — and was only 17 seconds away from the first-place time.

Banville hopes to recruit more student members, win a team race in the next two to three years and send a member to the national championships within five years. To reach those goals, he has the team ride about 20 miles in a tight pack to simulate race-like conditions.

Comeaux finds excitement in the inherent risks associated with the sport as well as the training and skill level needed. “If I wreck, I don’t have anymore skin,” he says. “Knowing that really gets your blood pumping.”

The chemistry junior from Napoleonville appreciates how cycling has helped him add exercise and competition into his lifestyle. “It’s one of the easiest things to get started with,” Comeaux says. “All you need is your bike and 20 miles under your belt.”

— Lee Daigle

On the Nicholls nightstand

The Try: Reclaiming the American Dream

At some point, all of us dream big and set bold goals, but what is it that separates those who accomplish unbelievable feats and those who fall short? Author James Owen argues that it’s not talent, money or intelligence; it’s “the try” — a tireless work ethic and never-give-up attitude. This year, Nicholls freshmen will read The Try: Reclaiming the American Dream as part of the Common Book initiative. The inspirational 158-page book, published in 2010, tells the story of 12 average people who have achieved great successes by being relentless, driven, fearless and resilient. On Tuesday, Nov. 13, Owen will visit the Nicholls campus for a 2 p.m. question-and-answer session and 7 p.m. lecture in Peltier Auditorium; both events are open to the public. — Stephanie Detillier
One for the history books

James Barnidge has left Nicholls.

The longtime history professor has bid goodbye to the university, to Thibodaux, to his family, to his home and to his bicycle.

But don’t despair.

He’s left 38 times before, and he’s always come back.

*Bringing European tradition to Ardoyne Drive*

This past June, Barnidge and a group of 63 students and community members left for Nicholls Europe, the second longest-running international study program in Louisiana. It marked the 39th session since Barnidge invented the program in 1974.

"Imagine a Nicholls student at Mozart’s keyboard in Salzburg," he says, as if conjuring from a crystal ball, "or a science student at the Tower of Pisa or an art major in the Sistine Chapel. That’s what Nicholls Europe is all about.”

The crystal ball, of course, is a world globe, the conjurings are memories of traveling students, and the magic of it all is seeing the lives of those students change before his eyes.

Barnidge’s own life changes, too. Each year he returns from Nicholls Europe with “instant rejuvenation” and new, firsthand experiences to share in his lectures. One year, he returned with a historical European tradition that has become iconic at Nicholls — bicycling to work.
“It’s my forced exercise,” says Barnidge, who has biked the streets of Amsterdam and Paris. Most mornings, however, he can be found on a red bicycle riding across Ardoyne Drive to campus from his home in the Thibodaux Country Club.

**Getting it under his fingernails**

Early in life, Barnidge began to appreciate history and tradition. The red-haired boy was born and raised on the banks of the similarly colored Red River in Alexandria — not far from the site of Bailey’s Dam, the infamous log and rock structure that raised the river and permitted the Union Navy’s retreat in 1864. He remembers digging as a child, hoping to find bullets and other Civil War artifacts buried in the red soil.

At colleges in the ’60s, “digging history” had multiple meanings. For Barnidge, it meant taking that childhood fascination into the archives at Louisiana State University, where the subject of his master’s thesis was G. Mason Graham, father of that university. He completed the thesis alongside renowned professor T. Harry Williams, whose own research on Huey Long became a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography.

How important was that mentorship? “If you’d heard T. Harry Williams lecture, then you’d know what I’m talking about,” Barnidge says. “He just moved an audience.” Not ironically, those who have heard Barnidge lecture know exactly what he's talking about.

**Crunching the numbers**

Twelve to 18 credit hours per semester, up to 45 credits per year, as many as 80 individuals per three-credit class, 800 to 1,000 individuals per year, for 46 years. It sounds like financial analysis. But that wouldn’t be odd to Barnidge, who earned his undergraduate degree in finance and economics from LSU. In fact, his first professional job was as a cost analyst for Kaiser Aluminum in Baton Rouge. He never intended to teach — much less history, which he studied for fun — but a kind boss at Kaiser encouraged him.

Thus, his second professional job, begun only a year later, was teaching history at Nicholls, a job he’s held for 46 consecutive years. Based on the numbers, Barnidge has taught more than 36,000 Nicholls students, many more than any other teacher ever at this university. And if these numbers were indeed financial analysis, they would represent a pretty good return on investment — one with a balance most certainly not “in the red.”

For Barnidge, it’s not a job. Although no crystal ball could have predicted the grand celestial coincidence of red hair, red river, red dirt, red bricks, red bicycle and red mascot, his Nicholls career has certainly been in harmony with the music of the spheres.

And like clockwork, Barnidge has now returned home from Europe for the 39th time. It seems appropriate that the man who presented so much of the world to so many in the Nicholls community has created his own world: When he next bicycles to campus, he’ll be departing his home in the Country Club, a community he helped grow, in a parish under a Home Rule Charter he helped author and in a state under a constitution he helped draft.

How could we ever believe that he’d leave for good? — Dr. John P. Doucet
A successful pairing

Dr. Allyse Ferrara grew up half a mile from a 200-acre lake in Ohio, “knee deep in mud or in the water chasing something,” she says. “Truth is, I guess not much has changed.”

Her husband, Dr. Quenton Fontenot, doesn’t mind the muddiness one bit. The self-described “good south Louisiana hybrid” spent his own childhood exploring Louisiana’s waters and bayous, and he continues to do so.

As associate professors of biological sciences, Allyse and Quenton are as iconic at Nicholls as June Carter and Johnny Cash were in the entertainment industry. There’s this simple authenticity to them. When they’re not researching alligator gar or teaching future biologists, they’re attending campus events, looking for their next great meal and living life to the fullest — as both co-workers and husband and wife. It’s more than their job. It’s who they are, and maybe that’s the most powerful lesson their students can learn.

“I took a class about fish, and when I found out they’ll give you a degree for fish, I changed my major.” — Quenton

The daughter of a biologist and an English teacher, Allyse grew up in Chardon, Ohio, a small town just outside of Cleveland. An only child, she spent summers in the water at her father’s hip and
learned an appreciation for literature and culture from her mother.

The oldest of three, Quenton grew up in Denham Springs, a Baton Rouge suburb. His father was chief of inland fisheries for the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and his mother worked for a local Catholic church as director of religious studies.

Heavily influenced by their parents’ passions, Allyse and Quenton both enrolled in nearby colleges — Quenton as a pre-med student at Louisiana State University and Allyse as a pre-vet student at Hiram College in Ohio. Well into their undergraduate course work, they both discovered that their true interest was not medicine but fish.

“She doesn’t wear high heels anymore. She wore them one day, and I had tennis shoes on, and I caught her.” — Quenton

It was 1999, at a fisheries conference in North Carolina. The two were working toward their doctoral degrees in fisheries — Allyse at Auburn University in Alabama and Quenton at Clemson University in South Carolina. Although they didn’t know each other, their advisers did, and a professional courtesy introduction is all it took.

The two spent the next few months sharing fishery ideas and research findings, discovering one common interest after another — music, the outdoors, fishing, hunting, traveling — and forming a friendship. Allyse invited Quenton to visit Auburn, and he took her up on the offer.

“When I first walked into her house, I noticed that she had the box sets of Patsy Cline and Hank Williams Sr., and I thought that’s pretty cool,” Quenton recalls. “And then, on the wall in her bedroom, I saw that she had a 20-gauge shotgun hanging up, and I said, ‘Oh yeah, this is good.’”

The two attended a big, Auburn-style Mardi Gras party that spilled into the early hours of the morning. Over breakfast the next day, Quenton asked Allyse and her father (who took a yearlong sabbatical to help his daughter with her doctoral project) to go with him to New Orleans for an authentic Mardi Gras celebration.

“We all headed for Mardi Gras, piled into his little Nissan truck,” Allyse says. “I think my dad didn’t want to talk to me for about three months, but we sure had a lot of fun.”

After nearly two years of dating, the fisheries students were married on the banks of Bass Lake in Chardon, where Allyse had grown up. Fittingly, they honeymooned in Grand Isle, where Quenton had spent many carefree childhood days.

“I’ve been Allyse Ferrara my entire life. I like my last name. He could have taken it!” — Allyse

A year later, after earning their doctorates, Quenton and Allyse began their careers.
at Nicholls. Despite not having any job openings, Dr. Marilyn Kilgen, department head for biological sciences at the time, interviewed the couple. Once a position became available, Allyse was hired in spring 2002, and Quenton came on board that fall. Not sharing the same last name has been known to lead to rumors.

“A lot of students don’t realize we’re married at first,” Quenton says. “They’ll tell our graduate assistants, ‘I think there’s something going on between Dr. Ferrara and Dr. Fontenot. They’re acting kinda funny.’ Usually the GAs will play along, saying, ‘Oh, you have no idea!’”

In their relatively brief time at Nicholls — they’ve just hit the decade mark — Quenton and Allyse have made quite an impact. Together, they’ve secured nearly $1 million in grant revenue. In addition to their teaching and research, they are also co-directors of the Bayousphere Research Lab, overseeing student research projects. And they are heavily involved in the university’s Louisiana Swamp Stomp Festival.

“Working together we are so much more productive than we would be if I were by myself or she were by herself,” says Quenton, who was named interim department head in 2011.

“When people find out we have season tickets to the opera, they want to know, ‘What’s the joke?’”
— Quenton

But what do two biologists do when you take away fish and water? Plenty.

The two have set up house on the outskirts of Thibodaux, just 7 miles from the Nicholls campus and 1 mile from the nearest boat launch, and they share it with a few unusual houseguests — a 27-pound female tortoise named Pete and two doves, Pork Chop and Boudin.

Digging in their garden and cooking with the fresh harvest — peppers, tomatoes, figs, satsumas, kumquats, lemons, basil and thyme — are a couple of ways the couple celebrate their love of food. Another is dining out.

“We don’t splurge on a lot of stuff, but we do splurge on nice restaurants,” Quenton says. “Luckily, Allyse has a sophisticated palate and can re-create anything we enjoy in a restaurant at home.”

On Saturdays, they often head to the Big Easy for a New Orleans Opera performance and dinner at Lüke or Bayona. Three years ago, they attended their first live performance of Carmen at the Mahalia Jackson Theater. They’ve been season ticket holders ever since.

“I know it sounds crazy, but I love it,” Quenton says. “I love live performances. From Cajun to Dixieland to opera, if it’s performed well, I like it.”

The boundaries between Quenton and Allyse’s personal and professional lives are blurred. They approach everything — whether it’s cooking, mentoring graduate students or preserving our precious wetlands — with genuine curiosity, interest and passion.

There is an easiness about Quenton and Allyse — as if everyone should be able to get up and go to work doing something they absolutely love, at a place that they love, with the one that they love. It’s just natural. It’s how it’s supposed to be.

“My mom tells me that one time, when I was about 6 years old, we were passing by Nicholls on our way to Grand Isle,” Quenton says. “I told her, ‘Man, Nicholls would be the perfect place to work because you have freshwater fish right here and saltwater fish right down the road.’ I still agree with that statement.” — Renee Piper
Through Lillie’s lens

For a glimpse at Deborah Lillie’s multifaceted life, look no further than her office walls. Nearly every inch is covered with family treasures, artifacts picked up during international travel and photographs — lots of artsy photographs taken by Lillie, her students and her admired colleagues. Taped to the ceiling are textured world maps, and leaning against her windowsill is an X-ray of a K-9 dog that Lillie cares for and trains. As she sits next to her cappuccino machine and handmade ceramic mugs — in a corner of her office that she calls “the café” — Lillie tells stories about each piece. With her soft, cool demeanor, it’s easy to lose track of time.

A native of Ann Arbor, Mich., Lillie has an unassuming yet versatile presence on the Nicholls campus. She can often be found in the photography and sculpture studios, where she serves as an instructor of both disciplines. Or in the Ameen Art Gallery, where she helps coordinate student art shows. Or even in Talbot Hall’s foundry, where she does blacksmithing.

Although Lillie has always wanted to teach, art was not her original plan. “I resisted majoring in art for a while,” she says. “I guess I just didn’t value it as much as I should have, probably because it came so easily to me.”

Now, in her 14th year as an educator, Lillie is known as a stickler for the technical aspects of her students’ art. She does, however, strive to be a fairly hands-off instructor, hoping that students learn to recognize their own vision.

“I make it my business to really get to know my students as it relates to their artwork.”

“I make it my business to really get to know my students as it relates to their artwork,” Lillie says. “That way, I can give them feedback on how well they seem to be tapping into what is really ‘them’ and not just making stuff that looks like what they’ve seen presented as ‘legitimate’ artwork elsewhere.”

Outside the classroom, Lillie trades one type of student for another. In 1999, she began working with police groups as an interested civilian. Now she’s a reserve K-9 deputy with Assumption Parish Sheriff’s Office, where she trains police dogs, especially for search and rescue.

Lillie says that as her great-grandfather lay on his deathbed, he made a special request to the family: “Make sure Deborah knows that her uncle was a blacksmith, a photographer and a taxidermist,” he said. “That must be where she gets it from.” — Lee Daigle
Expert Tips

Managing your mood

It’s hard to escape phone calls bearing bad news from family members, stories about massive layoffs and unemployment from the media, or daily complaints from co-workers. In today’s downward economy, salaries often remain stagnant while gas prices, insurance costs and grocery bills spiral upward. Negativity, anxiety and depression lurk around the corner — sometimes creeping into our own office spaces and homes.

Candace Park, one of two state-licensed therapists in the University Counseling Center, sees these widespread problems daily. During the spring 2012 semester, the counseling staff had more than 700 appointments with students, faculty and staff. Park cites depression, anxiety and relationship issues as the top three problems that clients come in to discuss.

For those in need of a more positive outlook, Park offers some advice on dealing with negative attitudes, incessant worrying and people who consistently get you down.

Give and encourage positive feedback. Comments such as “You did a great job” or “I really liked the way you did that” can boost spirits in the workplace. Research has shown that what employees want most is to feel appreciated and valued.

Think happy thoughts. Instead of focusing on your worries, think of fun activities for your child’s upcoming birthday party, sketch out plans to renovate your bathroom or make a grocery list of ingredients you’ll need to make that chocolate-chip cookie-dough sandwich cookie recipe you found on Pinterest.

Plan a vacation. Whether it’s a day trip to the beach, a relaxing cruise or a Walt Disney World adventure, studies show that anticipating and planning a vacation decreases depression and gives you a better outlook. Time off is an important tool in reducing stress and improving well-being and job performance.

Take breaks. A five- or 10-minute break to walk outside or get coffee can temporarily remove you from an unpleasant conversation or situation. During lunch, invite a co-worker to join you for a walk rather than sitting at your desk.

Redirect unpleasant conversations. Make it clear you’re not interested in complaining about the economy or criticizing a co-worker. Change the subject, or try to find some humor in the negative situation. As Mark Twain said: “Humor is the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our irritations and resentments slip away, and a sunny spirit takes their place.”
Keeping your cool

Soaring temperatures are nothing new in south Louisiana, but they’re becoming more dangerous. In the U.S., heat waves cause more deaths than hurricanes, tornadoes or any other weather phenomenon. Although staying indoors is the best course of action during extreme heat, that advice isn’t always practical or preferable.

Kimberly Shaw, instructor of athletic training at Nicholls, has been researching the combination of heat and exertion. Often times, high temperatures, humidity and exercise intensity lead to dehydration, which occurs when fluid intake is not sufficient to offset the body’s water loss via sweating. While finishing up her doctorate in exercise physiology at the University of Alabama, Shaw has focused on how much time it takes aging runners to recover from a high-intensity 5K race and how age factors into that recovery time, particularly in the heat. She offers tips for keeping your children and yourself safe when the temperature rises.

For children:
- Make sure that kids are well-hydrated prior to going outdoors. Supervise their outdoor play in hot summer months, and look for signs of heat-related problems including irritability, headaches, disinterest or cramping.
- Move children to a shaded or air-conditioned area if you suspect a problem. Use outdoor fans and bags of ice for quick cooling.
- Schedule activities before noon or after 4 p.m.
- Dress children in light-colored clothing.
- Give fluids often. Cool drinks or freezer pops are usually enough for mild dehydration, but it’s better to offer small amounts rather than large amounts at one time. Avoid water as the primary replacement fluid, as electrolyte solutions are more effective.

For adults:
- Begin outdoor exercise well-hydrated, and maintain fluid levels during activity.
- Be careful when mixing heat with medication, alcohol or caffeine, which accelerate dehydration.
- Drinking extreme amounts of water, following significant fluid loss, can lead to hyponatremia (water intoxication), a chemical imbalance caused by electrolyte deficiencies. Symptoms of hyponatremia (confusion, heart palpitations, lightheadedness and lethargy) often mimic those of dehydration. When this happens, drinking more water only makes the condition worse. Thus, drinking electrolyte-rich beverages (such as Gatorade), diluted one-fourth to one-half with water, is more efficient in replacing lost nutrients.
- To decrease core body temperature fast, immerse yourself in a cold-water pool or tub. If immersion is not possible, cover as much of your body as possible with ice bags and cold towels.

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Exercise, and eat healthy.
Break a sweat, and you’ll stay cool under pressure. Walk, take a Zumba class or swim. Exercising boosts your endorphin levels, helps you forget about your troubles and can improve your sleep. Poor eating habits can also contribute to anxiety. Devote time to planning healthier meals and snacks.

Schedule after-hours activities with co-workers.
Meet for dinner, have a game night or play cards while having a glass of wine with some potluck appetizers and desserts. Set rules against discussing work, and make it a no-negative zone.

Prioritize your needs.
Make the best of a stressful situation by putting yourself first. Focus on yourself, your family and the good things in your life to help get back on a positive track.

— Debbie Papa Kliebert

In addition to University Counseling Services, Nicholls houses the Psychology Training Clinic, which is open to the public and charges fees based on income. The clinic is staffed by Nicholls graduate students from the Department of Psychology and Counselor Education. For more information, call 985-448-4362.
**Make-at-home recipes from LeBistro**

**White Chocolate Almond Bread Pudding**

- 5 cups white bread, cubed
- 2 cups half and half
- 1 tablespoon almond extract
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 cup white chocolate chips, melted

(Melt chocolate using double-boiler method or in microwave.)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place cubed bread on a cookie sheet and bake for 5-6 minutes. Transfer baked bread cubes to a mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, combine half and half with almond and vanilla extracts. Pour mixture over bread cubes, stirring gently to soak bread. In another bowl, beat together eggs and sugar; then add melted chips. Fold into bread mixture. Pour into an 8-inch, nonstick-sprayed square pan. Bake uncovered for 50-60 minutes, until a knife inserted in pudding comes out clean.

**For sauce:**
- ½ cup slivered almonds
- 1 ½ cups white chocolate, melted

Toast almonds in a 350-degree oven for about 5 minutes, until golden. Drizzle melted white chocolate over top of the bread pudding, and top with toasted almonds.

Source: Adapted from epicurious.com

Yield: 9 servings

**Shrimp and Andouille Pasta**

- 1 pound shrimp
- Creole seasoning, to taste
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 cup ham-cut andouille (such as Veron’s), diced
- ¼ cup onion, diced
- ¼ cup celery, diced
- ¼ cup red bell pepper, diced
- ¼ cup yellow bell pepper, diced
- ¼ cup tomatoes, diced
- ½ cup mushrooms, sliced
- ¼ cup garlic, diced
- 1 pinch thyme
- 1 pinch basil
- 1 ounce white wine
- ¼ cup flour
- 4 cups heavy whipping cream
- Dash salt
- Dash cayenne
- ¼ cup parsley, chopped
- 3 cups penne, cooked

Season shrimp with Creole seasoning. In a 10-inch, heavy-bottom saute pan, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add shrimp and saute for approximately 3 minutes, or until slightly pink. Remove shrimp with slotted spoon and set aside. To the oil, add andouille, onions, celery, bell peppers, tomatoes, mushrooms and garlic. Saute until vegetables are wilted. Add thyme and basil, and deglaze with white wine. Sprinkle in flour, blending well into the vegetable mixture for approximately 1-3 minutes. Add heavy whipping cream, and bring to a low simmer, stirring occasionally to allow cream to reduce and thicken until its volume is reduced by about half. Return shrimp to pan. Season to taste using salt and cayenne, if desired. Add parsley and cooked pasta. Blend well into sauce and serve immediately.

**LeBistro tip:**

Alternative proteins, such as chicken, can replace the shrimp and still provide great flavor. By cutting your vegetables, peeling shrimp and cooking the pasta ahead of time, this could be a 30-minute meal.

Source: Chef John Folse

Yield: 6 servings
Creating kid-approved healthy food

Your 4-year-old doesn’t like carrots or anything green. Macaroni and cheese are his two favorite food groups. No amount of pleading or bribery will change his mind, and any attempt to add vegetables to his plate ends in a standoff. Getting little ones to eat anything that isn’t prepackaged or processed can be a big challenge for parents who want their kids to have healthy diets.

Amelie Benoit, a bistro instructor in the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute, is addressing that universal problem by assisting schools with healthy menu planning through a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant. Her own childhood weight struggle spurred her interest in the project, which helps local schools revise their menus, adjust recipes and monitor what kids eat versus what they leave on their plates.

Benoit believes that careful planning plays a big role in getting kids to eat healthier, and her tricks might just work on the finicky adults in your home, too:

**CAMOUFLAGE SECRET INGREDIENTS.** Add grated vegetables to ranch dressing, salsa, omelets, spaghetti sauce or pizza. Grated yellow zucchini can be included in mac ‘n’ cheese; mixed together with cheese as a pizza topping; or incorporated into scrambled eggs, spaghetti sauce, meatloaf or almost anything else you’re having for dinner. Tiny cubes of eggplant can be easily hidden in a meaty pasta sauce. Richly colored and pureed beans can offer a high antioxidant boost to chili. Try using oatmeal, rather than breadcrumbs, as a binder in meatballs or meatloaf. Cauliflower can be steamed, processed and added to mashed potatoes for a well-camouflaged side dish that’s nutritious and flavorful.

**PREP AHEAD AND FREEZE.** Use garden-fresh ingredients when possible. Package enough for one serving in small plastic freezer bags. Ice cube trays are another storage idea for pureed vegetables that can be popped out minutes before use.

**COAT WITH GROUND FLAXSEED.** For breading, try flaxseed, which has a nutty flavor, provides omega-3 fatty acids and is high in fiber. Whether your child wants homemade chicken nuggets or cheese sticks, a light coating of flaxseed followed by whole-wheat breadcrumbs creates a healthier substitute.

**MAKE IT A SMOOTHIE.** Make tasty alternatives to artificially flavored drinks or fast-food malts by using bananas, blueberries, yogurt or even peanut butter to make velvety-smooth shakes and smoothies.

**LET THEM EAT CAKE.** Add pureed pumpkin to chocolate cake or cupcakes. Applesauce is another healthy addition to cake mixes.

— Debbie Papa Kliebert

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**LeBistro**

needed for restaurant management.

Here are three popular LeBistro recipes, all using easy-to-find ingredients, that you can whip up at home.

— Debbie Papa Kliebert

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**Cream of Crabmeat and Spinach Soup**

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 ounces fresh spinach
8 tablespoons butter
1 onion, finely chopped
½ cup flour (or as desired)
1 pint half and half
1 ½ cups evaporated milk
2 cups crab or shellfish stock
1 pound lump crabmeat
Creole seasoning, to taste
Salt, to taste

Wilt the spinach in hot oil; remove from heat, chop finely and reserve. Saute onions in butter over medium heat until tender. Add flour. While whisking, cook flour for 2 minutes to form a white roux.

Add the half and half, evaporated milk, stock and spinach, and stir thoroughly to combine. Bring to a simmer, and simmer over low heat for 5 minutes. Gently fold in the crabmeat, making sure not to break up any lumps. Heat for 2 minutes. Season to taste with Creole seasoning and salt.

**LeBistro tip:**

This easy soup recipe can be changed to use whatever vegetable or seafood you have on hand. Try oyster and spinach or shrimp and mushroom combinations. Adding the seafood right before serving will prevent overcooking.

Source: Adapted from cdkitchen.com

Yield: 6 servings

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**Creating kid-approved healthy food**

— Debbie Papa Kliebert
The need for child’s play

In this era of video games, organized after-school activities and demanding homework assignments, children seldom hear the words “go play outside.” High-stakes testing combined with the notion that indoor and outdoor spontaneous play is a waste of time have contributed to the condition known as play deprivation.

Free time for creative play at school and at home has decreased while increased academic requirements and structured extracurricular activities have led to more stress and unreasonable expectations. However, imaginative play is critical to a child’s brain development, and it is the means by which all people develop communication, social and problem-solving skills.

Unstructured play reduces stress and has been shown to increase attention spans in children. Although today’s busy families have little time to play together, the benefits are well worth the investment.

Here are some suggestions for incorporating play activities into your family’s weekly schedule. First, eliminate distractions by turning off all electronic equipment.

- Establish a game night once a week. Each family member takes a turn selecting the game (cards, board games, sports, etc.).
- Plan a family recipe night. Each person prepares and serves a simple dish. Use those recipes to create a family favorites recipe book.
- Have family members be the judges during “Family Idol Night” to determine whose karaoke skills reign supreme.
- Create customized puzzles. Take individual pictures of everyone in the family; blow them up to 8 inches by 10 inches; laminate them; then cut them into pieces, creating puzzles of each person. Make a game of putting them back together.
- Make sock puppets of family members using old socks and craft supplies such as googly eyes, yarn, felt, markers, glue, etc. Take turns acting out a funny family story using the puppets.

Remember the old saying: “Children learn from play what no one can teach them.” Real playtime is not made up of schedules, expectations or goals — it’s simply for enjoyment.

— Dr. Lisa Lauer

Lauer is an assistant professor of education and chair of early childhood education in the Nicholls Department of Teacher Education. She has done significant research in play deprivation.
A new mother in Thibodaux takes a gamble. She hopes that money will be no object for moms-to-be who want to see what their newborns will look like. On opening day of her 4D ultrasound imaging business, she has three walk-in customers before the sign ever goes up on the building. With the help of the Louisiana Small Business Development Center (LSBDC), Peek-A-Boo Ultrasound in Thibodaux generated a profit in its first month.

Chances are that you, too, have a great idea, product or skill that others would be willing to pay for. Perhaps you’ve heard repeatedly that your cupcakes are just divine, or your ability to fix just about anything would make you a great handy worker. But do you have what it takes to turn that idea into a successful business?

For those ready to take the leap, the LSBDC on the Nicholls campus provides individual consulting, entrepreneurial seminars and various other services — all at no cost. To get started, the center’s business experts suggest potential entrepreneurs consider and research the following:

- Is there a solid customer base for your services, or is it just a fad? Feasibility and financing are crucial; start small.
- Whether you’re offering day care services or investing in rental property, check your city or local government’s guidelines, and consider overhead costs such as mortgage payments, insurance, property maintenance and taxes.
- If baking or catering is your passion, know that strict sanitary guidelines require a separate food preparation area for consumables sold publicly. Every city or parish has its own requirements, so do your homework before turning on that oven. If your Facebook page is filled with rave reviews about your incredible baked goods, word could also reach a licensed bakery across town. One phone call can shut you down and result in back taxes and penalties.
- Think through the additional costs. Have you considered self-employment taxes, wages, insurance, lease payments and bookkeeping services?

A great idea or product won’t guarantee success. Whether you’re making cookies, designing landscapes or refinishing furniture, your success will also be measured by your ability to control money and manage people.

For additional assistance, the LSBDC (partly funded through an agreement with Nicholls, the U.S. Small Business Administration and Louisiana Economic Development) walks entrepreneurs through the myriad startup costs and offers help with business plans, financial projections, marketing strategies and loans. Your idea just might be the LSBDC’s next profit-making success story.

— Debbie Papa Kliebert

To set up a consulting appointment, contact the center at 985-493-2587 or lsbdc.nic@lsbdc.org.
Lecture, grade, research. Repeat.

That’s often how the lives of faculty members are characterized. But the real-life stories of many Nicholls professors are much deeper and richer than that. 6 faculty members share unexpected, inspiring and interesting details about their lives outside the classroom.

By Graham Harvey | Photos by Misty Leigh McElroy

The stargazing couple

Dr. Chad and Kaisa Young are professional astronomers, but the circumstances of their story sound more like astrology.

The stars aligned in 2000, when Chad, a Mississippian, and Kaisa, a Missourian, met in the graduate astronomy program at the University of Texas in Austin. A faculty member who doubled as a matchmaker for several couples in the program introduced them.

Serendipitously, they were both studying the same specialty — low-mass star formation. The only difference was Kaisa focused on stars that form in clusters and Chad on stars that form in relative isolation. Their mutual interests led to several dates, marriage, two children and a relocation to Thibodaux, where they’ve become known as Nicholls’ resident astronomers — a life that both had dreamed of for years.

“I knew I wanted to be a scientist since elementary school,” says Kaisa, assistant professor of physics. “It was always my favorite subject, but it was reading about astronomy, especially Carl Sagan’s Cosmos, that inspired me. By the time I graduated high school, I had decided I wanted to be an astronomy professor.”

Likewise, physics appealed to Chad early on because of its “beautiful, ordered, mathematical view of the world.” In college, he initially went into nuclear physics but found it tiresome and boring. A stint at Los Alamos National Lab
Quick Fact: Dr. Chad Young is an avid cyclist, riding about 100 miles a week. Sometimes, it’s a solo activity, but often it’s a family affair with their 6-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter riding behind Chad and Kaisa on their tandem bike. As a family, they enjoy tent camping and admiring the beauty of a star-filled night sky from their treehouse.

pointed him toward the sky.

“The scale and grandeur of the universe’s laboratory was inspiring,” says Chad, an associate professor of physics. “From then on, I was hooked to be an astronomer.”

For research purposes, Chad and Kaisa rely more on star data retrieved from radio/infrared telescopes than on images generated by traditional optical telescopes. Their primary tool is the NASA Spitzer Space Telescope, which has been orbiting the Earth since 2003 and collecting unprecedented information on the universe that lies beyond the solar system.

“The Spitzer offers us a huge, new data set,” Chad says, “one that will probably give as many as 100 astronomers as much as a decade of work to do.” The data allow them to calculate distances from the Earth to various stars and to create theoretical, mathematical models of star formations.

Thanks to Kaisa, who became a full-time faculty member in August, Nicholls is offering a basic astronomy course for the first time in 10 years. Aside from classroom work, students will have the opportunity to stargaze with the university’s state-of-the-art telescopes. In the future, the couple hopes to host evening stargazing parties, perhaps at the university farm.

Just like when they first met, everything is falling into place for Chad and Kaisa at Nicholls, as if it were predestined — or written in the stars.
Dr. Keri Turner is a paragon of free-spiritedness and determination. At 19, she began literally roaming the earth, searching for inner peace and truth. Her meandering path brought her from California, where she was hired by Beach Boy Mike Love to tend to his transcendental meditation house — to India, where she taught English and meditated in an ashram.

Perhaps the younger Turner’s aversion to planting her flag on steady ground is what led the more-seasoned Turner to decide to live (at least part time) on the water. A few years ago, she got an urge to build a houseboat; never mind that she had no construction experience. Turner, an associate professor of English, checked out a book on wood-frame construction from the Nicholls library, found an old boat hull for sale in Napoleonville, gathered her own raw materials — “mostly reclaimed wood from the side of the road” — and set to work.

The ultimate DIY woman

The Thibodaux native accepted advice and help from family members and friends, including a Habitat for Humanity volunteer, but all in all, the planning and labor were Turner’s.

“I’m quite thankful for the experiences of my younger days,” she says. “They taught me patience among other things, and this houseboat would never have been built without that.”

Turner christened the boat as the Katy Lucy “because that’s what my mother would call me whenever I was good.” She hopes the vessel will behave, too, as it rests on Lake Verret at the mouth of Bayou Crab, where Turner’s grandfather once had a camp. After two years of steady construction, she moved into the houseboat on June 17, 2011, and now splits her time between her Lake Verret and Thibodaux homes.

Turner’s biggest challenge in constructing the houseboat was making sure the weight was evenly distributed throughout the hull — “a slow, painstaking process” — but her persistence paid off. The hull survived Hurricane Gustav as well as a subsequent tropical storm. The boat has since become a fully functional, livable home with solar-generated electricity, plumbing, outboard propulsion and a covered porch with a quintessential south Louisiana view — a backyard of sorts with cypress trees, alligators and ospreys.

When it comes to work, Turner performs her professional duties from both homes — teaching distance learning courses from the Katy Lucy and commuting to campus for traditional classes from her Thibodaux home.

“Of course, I prefer seeing my students face to face, but it all balances out,” Turner says, as she surveys the meditative qualities of the peaceful environment surrounding her boat.
The FBI-trained profiler

The Silence of the Lambs inspired not fear but a career path for Dr. Monique Boudreaux, associate professor of psychology. She paid close attention as FBI special agent Jack Crawford, played by Scott Glenn, oversaw FBI trainee Clarice Starling’s journey into the mind of a serial killer.

Years later, Boudreaux was among the last group of civilians to train under the man who inspired Glenn’s character — retired FBI special agent John Douglas. He’s the bureau’s original criminal profiler and author of Mind Hunter: Inside the FBI’s Elite Serial Crime Unit.

“Silence of the Lambs actually had a huge effect on my decision to move forward in graduate psychology studies,” says Boudreaux, a California native. “Well, that and an undergraduate instructor at UCLA who suggested I take a psychology course to break the monotony of my pharmacy curriculum. I switched majors immediately.”

Since then, Boudreaux’s educational and professional road has taken her from UCLA to Harvard to an FBI internship in Quantico, Va., and ultimately to “Our Harvard on the Bayou,” where she teaches courses on personality and child psychology.

Boudreaux still consults for the FBI and other law enforcement agencies, identifying criminal behavioral patterns to look for in investigations. Her expertise stems from her graduate research, in which she profiled 550 cases of missing and/or murdered children. With such a grim forte, Boudreaux’s spirit has been and continues to be tested.

“You need thick skin and a strong stomach,” she says, referring to the many crime-scene photos of abused and deceased children she has examined as well as interviews with convicted pedophiles. “You have to be able to temporarily turn off your emotions. Still, sometimes, frustration leads to tears, which lead to determination.”

She vividly recalls the case of a mother who falsely claimed her child was abducted. The child’s remains were found nearby, but there was not enough evidence to convict the mother. A few years later, the woman killed a second child, making the same false claims but being convicted this time.

“It made me sick to my stomach when I found out she had gotten away with it before,” Boudreaux says. “It was one of the few times I cried. When faced with brutal cases, I would often take a break, go to my FBI dorm room and listen to music or drive around to get a hold on my emotions.”

Retired FBI agents have told Boudreaux that her insights have helped with testimonies that led to convictions.

“It’s a great feeling to know that you’ve helped prevent other crimes from being committed,” she says. “But it isn’t more fulfilling than anyone else’s job. I believe that everyone’s job fulfills an important role.”

Quick Fact: Having extensively studied missing children cases, Dr. Monique Boudreaux has always been a high-alert mom. Outside of her family, the only person she allowed to baby-sit her children was her FBI supervisor. Today, her 13-year-old daughter is still not allowed to ride her bike around the block by herself. Boudreaux’s job has taught her that children who are alone, even in common situations, can be a predator’s target.
At 26, Laura Lott Valenti entered her first beauty pageant, checking off one item on her bucket list. Given her age, this would be her one and only chance to compete for the Miss Louisiana USA title.

Having never competed in a beauty contest before, she felt out of place among the younger, well-rehearsed competitors. Although she didn’t win, the Harvey native and Nicholls marketing instructor wasn’t ready to give up on her quest for a crown. A chance encounter with a pageant producer, coupled with her 2010 marriage, set the stage for Valenti to compete in Mrs. pageants.

“I really felt more at home among the Mrs. contestants,” Valenti says. “It is a whole different world of competition. It’s really more of a shared interest than a competition. We celebrate one another’s accomplishments, and there’s genuine camaraderie.”

Valenti competed in a string of regional pageants, winning Mrs. Louisiana Southeast in 2010 and Mrs. Louisiana Central USA in 2011. In May 2011, she took home the Mrs. Louisiana United States title, qualifying her for the national pageant in Las Vegas.

“When they called my name, I remember looking up and thanking God because all of my hard work had paid off,” she says. “This was finally my time.”

For Valenti, winning the title turned out to be more of a means to an end — allowing her to spend a year attending fundraisers and raising awareness for serious health care issues, including cystic fibrosis, breast and cervical cancer, and diabetes.

“I keep thinking I should focus my attention on one cause or charity, but it’s really a challenge to pick just one,” she says. “I want to help them all. If they need something, I want to be there for them.”

Valenti says that pageantry talents are woven seamlessly into her classroom lessons. “Many of the skills needed to succeed in the professional world are the same as those needed in the pageant world — confidence, poise, communication skills and the ability to think on your feet.”

As for her bucket list, it keeps growing. She’s added earning a doctorate — hopefully from Grenoble Ecole de Management in France, where she recently applied — and becoming a triple-crown winner, which would require victories in the Mrs. Louisiana International and Mrs. Louisiana America pageants.

“I try to set goals for myself that keep me striving to reach my full potential.”

Quick Fact: Laura Lott Valenti met her husband — firefighter and River Ridge native Ricky Valenti — on Match.com. “It was the best $59.95 I ever spent,” she says. The two had a surprise wedding ceremony on New Year’s Day 2010, with the frugal fashionista wearing a stylish wedding gown purchased from Target.com.
The weightlifting computer whiz

His motivation to get in shape was simple. Dr. Kent White felt overweight, tired and miserable. In 2000, the 43-year-old was weighing 206 pounds with a 42-inch waist and more than 20 percent body fat.

After a cancer scare, the 5-foot-7-inch associate professor and coordinator of computer science finally had enough of his unhealthy, underactive lifestyle and began training with EAS Sports Nutrition’s Body-for-LIFE program.

The result? A 43-pound weight loss, 18-inch biceps, 29-inch waist, less than 6 percent body fat and an unexpected journey of competitive success.

In his age bracket, White, now 55, has set world records for the bench press (374 pounds) and deadlift (534 pounds) in the American Powerlifting Association and World Powerlifting Alliance’s competitions in Defuniak Springs, Fla.

“It’s all amateur,” White says. “No pay. It’s a hobby. I just like the way I now feel and look, and I get complimented on my physique all the time. The other day, a 6-foot-3, 340-pound, really strong guy called me the hardest-working guy in the gym. That’s really gratifying.”

White trains for one to two hours, four to six days per week at Dynamic Health Club Inc. in New Iberia, where he lives. People are often surprised to learn that the bodybuilder is actually a soft-spoken computer whiz.

“The stereotypes of nerd and meathead don’t typically go together,” he says with a laugh.

Before he started accumulating powerlifting honors, White won a 1999 Windows World Open Award from Bill Gates for a software package he co-authored and programmed. At Nicholls, his students now ask for his help not only with computer science but also with fitness training.

“I enjoy watching students finally get a concept and having them come back later to say, ‘I hated you in class because you were really hard, but now I’m so appreciative,’” White says. “Now, I also have the chance to train students, watch them excel in competitions and help them with their diet.”

Each Sunday, White cooks his carefully planned meals for the week. His daily diet includes a breakfast of eight egg whites and a cup of oatmeal, a lunch with plenty of fruit and a ground turkey burger, a post-workout protein shake with more fruit and a supper of four to five ounces of lean meat and assorted nuts.

White says his regimen has not only turned his fat to muscle but has also transformed his palate. A year into training, he ordered a fried po’boy — one of his old favorites — and was surprised at his disgust.

“I didn’t enjoy the taste anymore,” he says. “It was terrible, rancid. Fried food just doesn’t appeal to me anymore.”

Quick Fact: Dr. Kent White embraces the stringent diet necessary for bodybuilding and weightlifting, but after more than a decade of training, he still won’t eat broccoli or cauliflower. His weakness? Sweets. “The hardest thing for me to pass up is chocolate ice cream,” he says.
A fresh take on fine dining
Two Chef John Folse Culinary graduates lead the kitchen of Restaurant August

By Stephanie Detillier
Photos by Misty Leigh McElroy
A fresh take on fine dining
Two Chef John Folse Culinary graduates lead the kitchen of Restaurant August
Past the deep mahogany-paneled bar, through the opulent dining room lit with crystal chandeliers and into the slightly cramped, sweltering kitchen, Executive Chef Michael Gulotta pan sears a fillet of sheepshead — a local fish often considered trash.
Guests might wonder how such an item would make its way into the elegant Restaurant August, Chef John Besh's flagship restaurant in New Orleans' Central Business District. But Gulotta's job is to keep the menu interesting, embedding some surprises.

The New Orleans native says this particular fish has picked up a bad reputation for good reasons: It's ugly. Its name is off-putting. And it's difficult to clean. While studying at the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute, Gulotta remembers his instructors dumping a hundred pounds of sheepshead on a table for students to practice their filleting skills. Years after graduating from Nicholls, he recalled that fish, with its large spine and tough scales.

"There's tons of sheepshead in the Gulf — because no one wants to clean it," he says with a laugh. "It's been called a fisherman's fish because that's the catch they'd get to take home at night and cook for their families. I thought, 'Why not serve it here?'"

To diners, the "trashy" dish certainly does not look or taste low class. The sweet, moist fish sits atop corn custard and succotash with a tomato vinaigrette. Gulotta's culinary creation is, in fact, indicative of what Restaurant August has become known for — an ambitious, sophisticated menu designed around local, fresh ingredients and clean, delicate flavors.

Behind August's award-winning menus and much-respected fine dining service are two Chef John Folse Culinary graduates: Gulotta (BS '03) and his executive sous chef, Jacqueline Blanchard (BS '06). Under their management, August has been named as one of Gayot's 2012 Top 40 U.S. Restaurants — the only Louisiana restaurant to make the acclaimed list.

"I am constantly in awe of the creativity and passion displayed by Mike and Jackie," Besh says. "They learned so much at Nicholls, but I am most impressed by their true understanding of and their commitment to local ingredients that inform each dish they create."

Determined to work for the James Beard award-winning Besh, Gulotta applied at Restaurant August three times before he was hired. Of all the renowned restaurants in New Orleans, what kept him going back to August was Besh's food philosophy.

"I didn't know you could cook veal cheeks and pork cheeks and oxtail, but I looked at his menu, heard what he was doing and thought, 'Man, I want to learn to cook like that,'" says the 31-year-old Gulotta. "John was using every part of the animal, doing all this great butchery, working with local farmers. All before any of this became popular."

After two 12-hour tryout shifts, Gulotta was hired as a grill cook, but there was one slight problem. In six months, he would be leaving for Europe. After visiting Italy with the art department, Gulotta had worked with culinary faculty to arrange a return trip for a five-month independent study. Besh, a proponent of chefs traveling to Europe, encouraged Gulotta but didn't make any promises about whether his job would be waiting for him upon his return. In those months leading up to his trip, Gulotta set out to make an impression on Besh.

"I think I surprised him in some respects," Gulotta says. "Nicholls really did prepare me. Chef Randy [Cheramie] challenged us to learn as much as we could about food history, which is what really impresses the good chefs."

By the end of six months, Gulotta had earned Besh's respect and job security. He traveled to Italy and came back as August's tournant, or roundsman, working every station in the kitchen. A year later, Besh sent Gulotta to work for his old mentor Chef Karl Joseph Fuchs in the southern black forest of Germany. There, he learned butchery, charcuterie (curing, smoking and preserving meat) and German country cooking techniques. His intention always was to return to New Orleans, but Hurricane Katrina sped up the process. Upon hearing of the city's condition and his mom's flooded Lakeview home, Gulotta flew back immediately and helped Besh reopen August.

"I spent my mornings feeding people...
“When August first started, we were bringing in a lot of European items, fish you can only get from the Mediterranean or northern Atlantic,” says Gulotta, who was made executive chef in 2007. “After the storm, we wanted to reinvest in south Louisiana so much so that we started doing almost entirely local — like the old great French restaurants that only worked with what they had at hand.”

The restaurant’s signature dishes such as the handmade potato gnocchi and breaded trout are still cornerstones of the menu, but Gulotta regularly adjusts the offerings to be seasonal, unexpected and fun. His creations are inventive — house-cured Gulf Coast lamb bacon and grilled tête de cochon (hog’s head) with grilled peaches, for example. But he’s careful to strike a balance between what he likes to cook and what customers like to eat.

“Too often chefs just want to show off what they know and what they can cook,” he says. “I preach to my staff that even if the guest wants something very simple, we’re going to do it to the best of our ability. If a little kid comes in and wants macaroni and cheese, we’re going to make him the best macaroni and cheese. It’s not about what we think is fun; it’s about what the guests like.”

For Gulotta, pleasing the palates of Restaurant August diners is only part of the job. As Besh’s right-hand man, Gulotta takes on prominent roles — presenting tips for home cooks on The Dr. Oz Show, demonstrating cooking techniques at the Aspen Food & Wine Classic, organizing a kickoff event for a Bon Appétit Grub Crawl and catering Will Ferrell’s Bacchus party, to name a few.

His job sounds glamorous. The celebrity chef culture and reality TV food shows certainly make it seem so. But the work is intense and grueling.

Gulotta is in charge of every aspect of August, from procuring ingredients to hiring and firing employees to improving the silverware and kitchen equipment. The past few years have been particularly challenging. As Besh opened several more restaurants, Gulotta helped train their sous chefs and lent August’s cooks until the new eateries were on solid footing.

To keep August running smoothly while he’s away, Gulotta turns to his executive sous chef and fellow Nicholls alum, Jacqueline Blanchard. Hired by Besh three years ago, Blanchard, who had externed at August during her sophomore year, was tasked with elevating the restaurant’s lunch service.

Each day her cooks check in around 7 a.m., just as deliveries of fresh fish, produce and meat begin arriving. The morning becomes a blur of adjusting the menu, itemizing and inventorying ingredients, preparing cooking stations and talking with food purveyors, both locally and across the country. Front-of-the-house staff must taste and familiarize themselves with new menu items, the table linens must be neat, the floors must be clean. The extra attention on lunch has made a difference — the restaurant’s $20.12 three-course prix fixe lunch has become a hit.

“It’s a lot going on, all within a few hours,” Blanchard says. “When I first got here, lunch was sort of a shadow of dinner, and we were understaffed. So it’s been really amazing to see what we’ve been able to do in three years — inspiring other local restaurants to elevate their lunch standards to emulate ours.”

Being a management-level chef is a nonstop lifestyle, but Gulotta and Blanchard have been prepping for this since college. In his junior year at Nicholls, Gulotta piled his plate high with responsibilities: president of Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity, president of the Junior American Culinary Federation campus chapter and member of the opening crew for Fremin’s Restaurant in downtown Thibodaux. On evenings and weekends throughout his college career, Gulotta worked in various restaurants, including Chef John Folse’s LaFitte’s Landing at Bittersweet Plantation in Donaldsonville. Fraternity members assigned him the nickname “All work and no play make Mike a dull boy.”

Blanchard’s freshman year was no easier. In addition to taking 18 hours a semester, she joined Sigma Sigma Sigma sorority and played on the Nicholls soccer team. After tearing her ACL, she decided to focus all of her energy on culinary.

It certainly paid off. Blanchard’s first jobs after graduating from Nicholls were at the French Laundry and then Bouchon — Napa Valley, Calif., restaurants owned by Thomas Keller, largely considered America’s most influential chef.
"At the time, the French Laundry was regarded as the best restaurant in the world, and I was able to get a job not knowing anybody there or having any references," Blanchard says. "The experience exposed me to a whole other world, and it shaped me fundamentally and professionally."

Before returning to Restaurant August in 2009, she worked at Frasca Food and Wine in Boulder, Colo., and at Blue Hill at Stone Barns in New York.

Few female chefs make it up the ranks in the restaurant industry, but the petite, 5-foot-3-inch Blanchard had been toughening herself up and sharpening her culinary chops for years before even entering college. Putting up with her three brothers gave her fortitude, and taking notes while watching cooking TV shows as a child helped prepare her for culinary school.

"As soon as the show was over, I'd be in the kitchen trying to replicate it," she recalls. "My mom would get so mad because I'd make a mess. When she would punish me, she'd punish me from cooking."

Blanchard's and Gulotta's success at such a young age doesn't surprise Chef Randy Cheramie the least bit. Cheramie, executive director of the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute, says that only about 5 percent of culinary graduates ever reach a top management position, but that it was a foregone conclusion for these two. He considers Blanchard, Gulotta and Drake Leonards (BS '08), a sous chef at Besh's La Provence, as "three of the best representatives of true craftsmen chefs we've put out there."

"They were voracious hunters of anything culinary," Cheramie says. "If I had an event, they were at my elbow. They just weren't looking for Friday and a paycheck, and they wouldn't work for someone whose food philosophy didn't mesh with theirs."

"Literally, we just go and look at the trucks showing up with all the local produce and see what's in season, what's at the peak of freshness," Gulotta says. "We sit down and share a pot of coffee and talk about food. We throw ideas around, cook together, taste them, and sooner or later they're on the menu."

Fresh, local and seasonal have become buzzwords in the American culinary scene. But to Gulotta and Blanchard, it's more than a trend. It's who they are at their core.

Taking over Gulotta's backyard are various vegetable plants; kumquat, fig, satsuma and peach trees; a muscadine grape vine; and blackberry and blueberry bushes. On a Sunday summer night, he might put some pork steaks on his backyard grill and make a vinaigrette using his own blueberries and blackberries. Or, before going to work, he might cook chicken in red curry using freshly picked sweet kumquats for his wife, Melissa. Gulotta looks forward to cooking for his twin 1-year-old boys and already buys heirloom vegetables to cook and puree for them. He attributes his style to his great-grandmother, an "old Italian lady who grew up on a farm and always cooked with her own vegetables."

Likewise, as soon as Blanchard has a couple of days off, she's planning a pig roast or crawfish boil in her backyard. Influenced by her grandmother's farm-inspired cooking, Blanchard, whom Cheramie describes as a "hippie at heart," built her career by seeking out chefs and restaurants specializing in similar cuisine. She even worked a stint at Chez Panisse under Chef Alice Waters, who is considered the "mother of American food" and one of the most prominent organic food movement supporters.

"Growing up, I was always tugging at my grandmother's apron, dying for her to let me chop or peel something," Blanchard says. "She lived on a farm, so we were always picking pecans from the backyard trees to make pecan pies, wringing the necks of chickens and plucking their feathers, killing a hog and finding uses for all of its parts. Fresh and local are hip and in vogue today, but to me that's just how it always was."

It's that intense need to make people happy through their food — even on their days off — that sets Gulotta and Blanchard apart. It's what keeps them going through long shifts and demanding schedules. When the stress begins to get to Gulotta, he thinks back to the night when a woman arrived at the restaurant to celebrate a special occasion. August has an open-kitchen policy, so she was invited to peek inside. As she walked through the door, the kitchen staff clapped, as they usually do, but much to her surprise, the woman started crying and walked around to hug each person.

"She said, 'This meal is to celebrate me being cancer-free. I'm never going to forget this.' She still comes back each year on the anniversary of that date," Gulotta says. "That's one of the stories I bring up when we've had a rough week and I pull my cooks together for a powwow. It makes you feel better about serving food to people every day, wondering whether or not they're just forgetting about it, going home and going to bed — or whether they're remembering the meal for the rest of their life."

Raised by a single mother who always found time to cook, Gulotta enjoys serving meals to customers and family alike. In 2011, he returned to Nicholls to cook as the distinguished visiting chef for the Lafcadio Hearn dinner, a fundraiser for the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute.

Today, nearly 90 percent of August's ingredients are local — including all of the restaurant's beef, pork, duck, chicken, herbs, butter and berries. And what's available locally often dictates what's on the menu.

Voilà/The Magazine of Nicholls State University
Orientation leaders Mallory Carrere and Whitney Babin escort incoming freshmen to Peltier Hall. The Office of Admissions hosts nine orientation sessions leading up to the fall semester; the 2012 theme was Las Vegas.
What it’s like to be an orientation leader

Story and photos by Misty Leigh McElroy
Most people shy away from awkward situations. Mallory Carrere gravitates toward them. Such an unlikely trait comes in handy as she encourages incoming Nicholls freshmen to step out of their comfort zones.

Carrere, an elementary education senior from Bourg, is one of 32 orientation leaders who help incoming students schedule classes, navigate university procedures and learn about campus resources. With skits, costumes, inflatable dice and bags of candy, orientation leaders form bonds with new students and help them discover where they can fit in — whether it’s with an academic-related club, an intramural sports team, a fraternity or sorority, or a service organization.

Throughout late spring and summer, the Office of Admissions hosts
several orientation sessions to help ease the transition from high school senior to college freshman. Carrere sees it as her personal mission to share with freshmen what she believes is the key to a fulfilling college experience: Involvement.

Until Carrere joined campus organizations in her junior year, she disliked college and stuck to her friends from high school. After embracing collegiate life, she found herself happier, with more friends and with the opportunity to join the spirited team that welcomes new freshmen to Nicholls.

“This is my chance to show off my campus, my home,” she says. “I think if students leave orientation fired up, they’ll have a good attitude and they’ll get involved, which means they’ll have to keep up their grades, which prepares them to do well in life. I like being a part of that.”

Clockwise: In Ellender Library’s computer lab, Carrere helps a student schedule her first-semester classes. At lunch in Galliano Hall, she talks with a culinary freshman about an internship she did at Walt Disney World. During the spirit contest, Carrere cheers on her blue team. At day’s end, Laurie LaRose, orientation coordinator, meets with her leaders to discuss how the session went and what can be improved.
Using research and innovative teaching, Nicholls trains nursing students to care compassionately for patients from birth to death.

By Renee Piper

From first breath to last, nurses are there, infused in life’s most precious moments. Their patients all hope for the same thing — nurses with the medical know-how and caring bedside manner to help them through their life cycle of health care needs.

For patients in the tri-parish area, chances are high that they will receive just that — competent, compassionate care — most likely from Nicholls graduates, who make up 80 percent of the nursing staff at the region’s clinics and hospitals.

With that in mind, the Nicholls Department of Nursing continuously strives to improve its preparation of students. Through applied research, innovative classroom techniques and hands-on clinical experiences, faculty members stress the importance of not only the technical skills but also the compassionate spirit needed to care for people from the cradle to the grave. Soon, a master’s degree program at Nicholls will provide additional opportunities for nurses to gain advanced-level education.

“Whether it’s the bachelor's degree or master's program, we focus on a holistic approach to patient care,” says Dr. Todd Keller, director of the undergraduate nursing degree program.

“Biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual — we teach our students to care for every aspect of a person. The greatest beneficiary of that learning is, and will continue to be, the patients of our graduates.”

AVOIDING FATIGUE IN LABOR AND DELIVERY

The celebratory sounds of new life — joyous laughter, spontaneous outbursts of happy tears and a newborn’s piercing cries — spill out into the hallway of Thibodaux Regional Women and Children’s Center.

A few doors down, the sounds of anguish and heartbreak are heavy as a couple learns that the baby they had so desperately wanted would be stillborn. What should have been a celebration turns into unspeakable pain.

So begins another day in the life of a labor and delivery nurse. Being a part of life’s biggest moments is both exhilarating and exhausting. Navigating the highs and lows of the profession while maintaining a sense of personal well-being often becomes challenging.

Nurses who fail to find a balance are at risk of developing compassion fatigue. They might find themselves burnt out, disengaged, emotionally overloaded, less productive and struggling to empathize or form bonds with their patients.

“Nurses are expected to be happy and vibrant and never appear upset or overworked,” says Dr. Amanda Eymard, assistant professor of nursing. “We need to let nurses know that they have stress and give them an outlet so that they don’t experience burnout and leave the profession.”

As an honors nursing student, Chelsea Tamplain (BSN ’12) conducted research revealing that labor and delivery nurses are reluctant to discuss the effects of working in such an emotionally charged environment.

“Nurses are, at their very core, nurturing caregivers who put others’ needs above their own,” Tamplain says. “They didn’t want to talk about the toll the stress of the job was having on them for fear it would make them appear like a ‘bad nurse.’”

Tamplain’s research on compassion fatigue among labor and delivery nurses was the first of its kind, though many studies have examined compassion fatigue in other medical areas, such as oncology, ICU and hospice care. To minimize the potential for burnout, Eymard advises new and experienced nurses to create support groups of medical professionals with whom they can talk candidly. A healthy diet, regular exercise and time set aside to decompress are also important.

“From freshman- to senior-level classes, we weave lessons of compassionate care throughout the curriculum — compassion for patients and compassion for themselves,” Eymard says. “If we don’t teach our nurses to take care of themselves, how can they take care of others? And that’s our ultimate goal — the best possible care for the patient.”
FOSTERING ELDER EMPATHY

Dr. Amanda Eymard loves old folks. The 41-year-old assistant professor of nursing first stumbled upon her career path at age 11, when she began volunteering at a local nursing home.

Now in the classroom, Eymard looks for creative ways to share her infectious passion for the elderly. Instead of lecturing about the many trappings of old age — loss of hearing, failing eyesight, shortness of breath, compromised balance and stiff joints — she wants her students to literally feel what it’s like to be old. In 2006, Eymard received a grant, resulting in more than $23,000 of simulation equipment that does just that.

Vision-distortion goggles cloud students’ eyesight, making it difficult to read prescribed medication instructions. Special gloves make their fingers stiff and create difficulty opening pill bottles or brushing their hair. A physical-limitation suit lined with metal rods restricts bending and stretching. Empathy lungs create shortness of breath, and earplugs impede their hearing.

In the past six years, 128 students have participated in the Take A Walk In My Shoes project, and their journals indicate that the experience has helped teach them patience and empathy.

“The students’ journals confirmed that we are getting through to them and actually changing their stereotypical thinking,” Eymard says. “One student wrote, ‘I used to get really frustrated with older patients because I wanted them to move quicker, but now I realize that they want to move quicker; they just can’t. My whole perspective has shifted.”

In 2010, Americans 65 and older represented 13 percent of the total population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, that number is expected to rise to 20 percent by 2050. A growing elderly population means an increased demand in geriatric nursing care and training.

To meet those needs, Eymard and student volunteers have taken the empathy project on the road — providing in-service programs for nurses, lab technicians and certified nursing assistants throughout the region.

“Not only were our students excited about going out into the community, but many professionals who took part have indicated that their attitudes and prejudices about elderly patients changed because of our program,” Eymard says.
SPECIAL MISSION
As vice president of the ever-growing National World War II Museum, Nicholls alumnus Stephen Watson is out to redefine what a 21st-century museum experience should be.

By Stephanie Detillier    Photos by Misty Leigh McElroy
It happens almost daily for Stephen Watson. While walking to a meeting or checking in with the customer service staff, he notices a World War II veteran.

On Memorial Day, it happened twice. Given a special tag to wear, veterans are easy to spot in the cavernous pavilion of the National World War II Museum. Each time he sees one, Watson, the museum’s chief operating officer and vice president, introduces himself and thanks the veteran for his service. Each time, the reaction is nearly the same.

“They’re genuinely humbled and gratified. They don’t think of themselves as anything special, but they walk into this museum, and all of a sudden, they are the star,” says Watson (BA ’97, MBA ’98). “Most of the time, they’re with their sons and their daughters who are hearing things about their parents’ service that they never heard before.”

Such powerful reminders of the museum’s mission and impact keep Watson energized on long, stress-filled days. And he’s had his fair share of them.

When Watson joined the museum as its membership director in 2002, the idea of building a multi-complex, world-class institution was a lofty, far-off dream. Founded in 2000 by historian Stephen Ambrose, the original $25 million institution sought to tell the story of the D-Day invasion. Now, Watson, who was appointed COO in 2007, is playing a key leadership role in a $300 million expansion project that will quadruple the initial facility’s size and cover the entire war effort.

He’s already ushered in several new openings: the Solomon Victory Theater, showing a Tom Hanks-produced 4D film; a Stage Door Canteen, featuring big bands and USO-like performances; the John E. Kushner Restoration Pavilion, displaying the artifact restoration process; and the American Sector restaurant and Soda Shop, serving Chef John Besh’s cuisine. By 2015, he expects to add three more pavilions to that list.

“We’re building what we believe will be one of the finest museums of any kind in the world,” says Watson, who credits Nicholls for leading him to a career path he describes as “pretty remarkable.”
While growing up in Brechin, Scotland, Watson listened to his grandfather tell stories about being a British Royal Air Force pilot during WWII and flying an iconic propeller-powered Spitfire — one of which now hangs in the New Orleans museum. But back then, merely riding in an aircraft, not to mention piloting one armed with artillery, was incomprehensible to the young Watson. He didn’t board his first plane until Aug. 14, 1994, when he left Scotland en route for Nicholls. It had not been his intention to move to the U.S. until he met classmate Drew Sharkey (BS ’96) at the University of Aberdeen. Sharkey had signed up with College Prospects of America, an agency that helps find athletic scholarships for international students. Nicholls made an offer to Sharkey, who encouraged Watson, a national high school track champion, to follow suit.

Months later, Watson and four other Scottish track and field athletes were Thibodaux-bound. Clueless about south Louisiana, he recalls being concerned about running in such a warm climate. “I’ll always remember the day I arrived,” he says. “I walked out of the airport in the mid-August heat and said, ‘This can’t be real.’”

Aside from the temperature, the people at Nicholls — particularly former College of Business Administration professors Chris Cox and Beth LaFleur — left the deepest impressions on Watson. “They are indicative of what I think makes Nicholls a special place: small class sizes and professors who get to know you and take a personal interest in your development and success,” he says. “One of the things I enjoyed most about my time at Nicholls is that 15 years later, I count these people as my friends.”

His college years had their rough spots, like most do. Watson spent more time than he would have liked in the training room rather than competing on the track. And he resided in Long Hall — an imperfect living experience that drew him back to campus to gladly witness its implosion in 2008. Regardless, he took a liking to Nicholls and stayed for his master’s degree.

During that time, Watson picked up his first experience in fundraising and development through a graduate assistantship with the athletics department. His supervisor, Easton LeBouef, former associate athletics director, gave him much responsibility on game days and with Colonel Club initiatives.

“The fact that I could hand tasks over to a student and turn around without worrying was a miracle in and of itself. With Steve, it was no problem,” says LeBouef, who remarks that the tall, lanky Watson looks the same now as he did in college. “He went beyond the norm and always had such great enthusiasm. His success at the museum now goes to show his perseverance and work ethic.”

Watson’s graduate experience parlayed into a job as membership director and then development director at WWNO, the National Public Radio affiliate station at the University of New Orleans, where Watson also taught marketing. In 2002, he noticed a director of membership job opening at the museum. “There’s a lot of good will and excitement in the community about what this institution has done,” Watson says about why he applied. “As a young guy with a lot of energy and enthusiasm, it was a great opportunity for me to build and grow a national membership...
program for something that I cared about and thought was important for New Orleans and for this country.”

The National D-Day Museum, as it was then known, had about 25 employees and 3,000 members. Today, the National WWII Museum, which was renamed in 2006, employs around 275 people, 140 of whom report to Watson.

What’s more remarkable is that Watson has grown the museum’s membership to 130,000 — the largest of any museum in the country, even bigger than the Smithsonian Institution’s museums. Almost 90 percent of WWII Museum members live out of state, the vast majority never having stepped inside its doors.

Instead of the usual sales pitch (buying a membership, which includes yearly admission, is cheaper than buying two daily tickets), Watson’s team targets people who fought or lived through the period and family members of the 16 million people who served in WWII.

“We put to the back of the list a lot of the transactional components that typically come with a membership, which wouldn’t appeal to someone in, say, California,” he explains. “Our message was that we have to educate younger generations about what happened during this time and why it’s still important to us today.”
For the self-described “bean counter,” becoming COO in 2007 led to a refreshing crash course in WWII history, artifact restoration and museum exhibit design. When it comes to maintaining current exhibits or opening a new wing or building, Watson manages nearly every aspect: raising funds, collecting and preserving artifacts, designing exhibits, creating operational and staffing plans, marketing the museum and — ultimately — ensuring that visitors consider their experience memorable. His latest mission is to help redefine what a museum experience should be.

Exhibit A: Beyond All Boundaries.

The 4D film could almost be mistaken for a Universal Studios theme park attraction. Inside the 250-seat Solomon Victory Theater, seats rumble, life-size props rise from the floor, snow falls from above, and planes appear to fly right at audience members, who flinch as the aircraft begin firing. Hollywood actors including Brad Pitt, Tobey Maguire, Kevin Bacon and John Goodman lend their voices to narrate the story of WWII, from the Pearl Harbor bombing to America’s final victory.

“The artifacts and the real materials will always be a signature component; that’s part of what makes museums special,” Watson says. “But museums are no longer just about exhibit cases and text on the wall.”

Beyond All Boundaries still uses archival footage and the real words of veterans; it involves scholars and historians in the process to ensure authenticity. But it’s also creating a much richer experience so that a sixth-grader walks out of the theater and is wowed by it and wants more; wants to read a book about it, wants to go to the exhibits, wants to come back.

Watson is applying this approach to each aspect of the museum expansion. Opening in January 2013, the US Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center will feature Final Mission, a submarine experience where visitors will assume the identity of crew members and go aboard the last patrol of the most decorated submarine in the Pacific.

By 2014, admission tickets will come with a dog tag outfitted with a radio-frequency identification chip. Aboard a re-created 1940s train, visitors will use their scannable dog tag to select a real serviceman or woman to follow. At five points throughout the exhibits, visitors will be able to check in using their dog tag and find out what was happening to their selected person at that point in the war. The dog tags will also allow them to scan photos, letters and other museum content, which they will be able to digitally access from their home computers.

“We think this will be one of the most innovative uses of this technology in any museum of any kind in the country,” says Watson, who Gambit named to its 40 Under 40 list in 2011. “We have to use technology and interactives to engage our audience while they’re here, but we also have to think about how to engage people before they get here and after their visit.”

In addition to the physical museum expansion, Watson and his team are working toward digitizing collections and making them more accessible online. They’ve also grown their distance learning programs, allowing museum historians to deliver WWII lessons to classrooms across America via compressed video.

“It’s more than just a museum in New Orleans,” Watson says. “It’s a true commitment to be a national education institution and use all the tools we have to engage K-12 audiences, enthusiasts, historians, researchers, writers and filmmakers.”

Across Andrew Higgins Drive from the main museum facility (top), construction is in progress (bottom) on the US Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center. Expected to open in January 2013, the new pavilion will include large aircraft, an interactive submarine experience and a gallery honoring the 16 million soldiers who served in WWII.
The Wednesday after Memorial Day, it happened again. As Watson was walking down the pavilion stairs, he noticed a gentleman wearing a WWII veteran tag. The 91-year-old who had served in the 92nd Division in Europe was visiting the museum for the first time. As Watson spoke with the man, he noticed his humbled, overwhelmed, surprised emotions.

“I hear it a lot, ‘I’ve been planning on coming to the museum; I want to come.’ I always tell people, ‘If you mean that, you need to come now.’ Because you can walk into this museum now on a daily basis and talk to World War II veterans. But it’s an experience that won’t be happening here for much longer.”

Watson says he’s been to far too many funerals, lost many good friends during his tenure. But those relationships — with the men and women the museum was built to honor — are what he cherishes the most about what he does.

With Watson’s parents and siblings still in Scotland, the museum staff and volunteers have become his extended family. Nearly everyone in the museum knows him by name — from the security guard to the WWII veteran who talks with visitors about the New Orleans-built Higgins boats. Watson, who is married to an “unbelievably supportive” south Louisiana woman named Gina, often brings their 5-year-old daughter, Kate, along with him to work on Saturday mornings. Their 3-year-old son, Matthew, looks forward to any chance he gets to visit “dad’s museum.” Now that he’s a father, Watson often thinks back to the day he told his parents he wanted to go to Nicholls. They hadn’t expected him to leave Scotland and certainly didn’t expect that he’d stay in the United States beyond college.

“I certainly could never have predicted any of this,” Watson says. “But you know, my parents always taught me to have a good work ethic. I grew up on a farm in Scotland; I worked hard as a child. Throughout my life — when I was running, in school and in my professional career — I’ve tried to not get too high, not get too low. You’ve just got to keep focused. Keep pushing forward.”
WWII veterans Bob Bassett and Herman “Dutch” Prager Jr. are longtime museum volunteers who Watson interacts with regularly. Photo courtesy of the National World War II Museum.
Dylan Harrison likes a good challenge. When he moved to Thibodaux in 2009, he knew he was inheriting a team that had not won more than four games a season since 1998, when soccer became a Division I sport at Nicholls. But winning wasn’t his only obstacle to overcome.

When Harrison met community members — some of whom have lived in Thibodaux their entire lives — they didn’t even know Nicholls had a soccer field. Some thought the team played in the football stadium.

“That was something I took personally,” Harrison says. “I told my players that if we want the community to buy into what we’re doing, we need to give them a reason to.”

Harrison quickly introduced his scrappy, aggressive style of play and led his team to a record six wins in back-to-back seasons. But the scoreboard and record books only reflect part of the fourth-year head coach’s success. Because of Harrison’s efforts, the Colonels’ soccer field on Audubon Avenue has become hard to miss. On game days, Nicholls flags fly outside the entrance, outdoor speakers pump music and a steady stream of fans carrying folding chairs file onto the sidelines.

Also hard to miss is the brand-new soccer complex, adjacent to the field. Previously, soccer players hopscotched across campus to borrow other teams’ facilities. But thanks to fundraisers and student athletic fees, the complex — which opened Aug. 1 — provides soccer with its own locker rooms, meeting area, coach’s office, training room, showers, laundry area, public restrooms and concession stand.

To outsiders, the structure might just look like a field house, but to Harrison and his players, it’s a statement that Nicholls soccer is being taken seriously.

“When I took the job, it was with the understanding that we would do everything possible to get the building finished,” Harrison says. “It took a lot of work to get people excited about it, but this is a testament to the great administration we have and to the people of this area for believing in it.”
Making soccer his goal

With wavy blond hair, fair skin and blue eyes, Harrison could be mistaken for a California surfer. But the Texas-bred soccer player actually has Cajun roots.

Born in Thibodaux to Nicholls graduates Kevin (BA ’74) and Debbie Harrison (BA ’74, MEd ’85), he lived in Labadieville until age 6 — when his family moved to McAllen, Texas, only five miles from the Mexican border.

“I realized quickly that if I was going to fit in, I needed to start playing soccer,” Harrison says. “Their love of the sport was beyond anything I had ever seen.”

A natural athlete, Harrison excelled at soccer, earning a spot on the Olympic Development Program team. While playing at Trinity University in San Antonio, he helped the Tigers get to three NCAA Division III tournaments, twice advancing to the Elite Eight.

Once his senior season ended and he finished his business degree, Harrison traveled around Mexico while contemplating his career path. Soccer was not a part of his future plans until his phone rang one day, and Trinity coach Paul McGinlay was on the line.

“He offered to pay for me to get my coaching license,” Harrison says, “and I did it with no questions asked.”

The next five years were spent working his way up the soccer coaching ranks — from assistant men’s soccer coach at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio to head women’s soccer coach at Sewanee: University of the South in Tennessee. Only 25 years old at the time, Harrison worried about being such a young head coach. Although he knew he had much more to learn, he accepted the challenge and did quite well. In three seasons, he compiled 25 wins, including a 10-win season in his final year at the helm.

As he began searching for Division I head-coaching opportunities, he noticed an opening at Nicholls. The job interview took him back to a city that he only faintly remembered from his childhood, yet Thibodaux felt like home.

“Before the interview, I spent time with my family, and it calmed all of the uneasiness you feel when starting a new job or moving to a new area,” Harrison says. “By the time I got to campus and saw what they had to offer, I realized that there was a sense of purpose here that I wanted to be a part of. I sensed the start of something great.”

Starting a soccer movement

In south Louisiana, sports fans typically reserve Friday nights for high school football rivalries and Sunday afternoons for New Orleans Saints games. But a growing crowd has been skipping out on both to attend Nicholls soccer matches.

On Fridays and Sundays in the fall, fans arrive at the Nicholls soccer field with homemade noisemakers and spirit signs. From the coin toss to the game-ending horn, the crowd is in it 100 percent, and so is Harrison — shouting out game strategies, contesting calls with referees and coaching to win.

The players he’s recruited — 22 and counting — follow the mold set by their leader, competing with a determined desire to utterly dominate their opponents. That kind of play is needed to face the Colonels’ brutal schedule in the Southland Conference and against powerhouse such as Oklahoma, Tulsa and South Alabama, which are on the 2012 docket.

Although Harrison is still on the hunt for a conference win, he has accumulated more wins than any Nicholls soccer coach — 12 in the past two seasons. But to Harrison, that achievement is hollow. He has bigger goals for himself and the program.

“One of my biggest drives is pride, and not just pride in winning, but having that sense of giving these players something to be proud of, something they can look back on for the rest of their lives and say that they were a part of something special,” he says.

Many of Harrison’s plans involve sharing his soccer passion with the community. Since moving to Thibodaux, he’s joined a local adult soccer league, volunteered to coach a Louisiana Olympic Development Program team and become the regional director of the Eurotech Soccer Academy, a nationally recognized summer camp that offers sessions at Nicholls. His future goals for south Louisiana soccer are grandiose.

“The talent the state is producing is getting better, and one thing I would like to do is help create a stand-alone soccer facility here in the community where you can play all year,” Harrison says. “A lot of high school teams play in football stadiums on worn fields, but with a facility you could really kick-start a soccer movement.”

In the meantime, he’s giving back to the community in other ways. He and the Nicholls team volunteer with Habitat for Humanity’s construction projects and its annual 5K race. In 2011, he competed for the Mr. Habitat title at a fundraiser featuring over-the-top costumes, contests and antics. Dressed as a matador complete with a fake mustache and pink sash, Harrison took home the title.

“People who know me know I can rarely say no to something,” he says. “Where we live, you just can’t help but get involved because there are so many good people wanting to do good things for people who need it.”

That’s why he sees the new soccer complex as more than a building. To Harrison and his team, it signifies a promise to Nicholls and the community that if they come out to a game, they’ll see a hard-fought match — and they’ll have a chance to be a part of the community’s growing soccer culture.

“The sport has given so much to me that I want to do everything I can to pass it on,” Harrison says. “Hopefully, a young boy or girl will see us play and want to start practicing more than once a week. Maybe, they’ll want to grow up and be a Colonel.”

— Clyde Verdin Jr.
FOR as long as he can remember, Ross Mullooly has been competing for something. By age 3, he and his sister, Leila, had turned recreational trips to the pool into spirited swim meets. That youthful yet competitive drive eventually led the siblings to state championships with the Vandebilt Catholic High School swim team.

During high school, Ross also began running cross-country, outracing his opponents and catching the attention of the Nicholls track coach, who offered him an athletic scholarship. Once his sneakers hit campus, Ross made an immediate impression — competing in all five cross-country meets his freshman year, joining several campus organizations and making the honor roll.

But after his sophomore season, the 5-foot-8-inch runner found himself in a doctor’s office, searching for answers. Why was he losing so much weight? Why was he finding it harder to run?

The answer: Colorectal cancer.

With those two words Ross was on the starting blocks of a new race — the race for his survival.

RUNNING IS MY FREEDOM

For Ross, cross-country running was a happy coincidence. By his freshman year in high school, he was already a force in the water, earning a spot on the all-state swim team. Racing on land didn’t interest him until his coach suggested that running could strengthen his skills in the pool. Soon, Ross realized that his feet could take him virtually anywhere — without the hassle of borrowing his parents’ car.

“I enjoyed the freedom of it,” he says. “That’s what led me to join the cross-country and track and field teams that next season. It was a bit of a drastic change for my muscles, though, because I was using completely different parts of my body to compete.” Ross soon realized that the endurance and breathing techniques he developed in the pool came in handy on the track. The stronger leg muscles he built on the track also helped his swimming. It was the best of both worlds.

For the next three years, he earned five all-district and all-parish honors in cross-country and track, as well as 2008 all-state honors in cross-country. During his 2009 freshman season at Nicholls, Ross marked a career-best 8K time of 28:50 in the Southland Conference Championships. Clearly, competing against some of the country’s most elite distance runners didn’t seem to slow Ross down.

SOMETHING ISN’T RIGHT

The summer after his freshman year, Ross sensed something was wrong. He felt more tired than usual and was experiencing shortness of breath while running. But Ross chalked it up to stress. His first year of college had been a hectic one. He had not only juggled the responsibilities of schoolwork and college-level athletics, but he had also joined the Student Government Association, Orientation Team, the University Honors Program and Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity.

During his sophomore season, he pushed through the warning signs, consistently going to practice and competing at meets. But James and Monica Mullooly grew concerned at the sight of their visibly weakened son, who had suddenly lost 28 pounds.

“When they came to see me run in the meets, they saw how much weight I had lost and how my times weren’t as good as they had been,” Ross recalls. “They finally convinced me to see a doctor.”

At first, doctors said his symptoms seemed like a clear case of mononucleosis.

“I was basically sleeping all day, except to go to practice and to class,” Ross recalls. “But I thought I could run through it and it would eventually go away as the season went on.”

Despite numerous tests, countless doctor visits and a lot of rest, Ross wasn’t able to run with his teammates at the cross-country championships. Nearly two weeks later, on Nov. 10, he received his diagnosis — stage 3 colorectal cancer.

“My initial reaction was somewhat of a panic attack of questions,” Ross says. “The questions shot at me from all directions. Am I going to live? Will my life ever be normal? Is there a possibility that I can return to running? The most daunting question of all was: How will my family be affected?”

TRIUMPHS AND SETBACKS

In April 2011, Ross successfully underwent colorectal surgery, aided by a blood drive that his parents and Vandebilt Catholic sponsored. More than 86 units of blood — many donated by Nicholls students, faculty and staff — were collected.

“At that point, I didn’t even know that I would need to have blood donated to me,” he says. “Never in a million years would I have expected that amount of people to give blood. I am so grateful to them and Vandebilt.”

A series of setbacks followed. His weight remained below normal as a result of his radiation treatments. He had colostomy surgery, requiring him to wear a colostomy bag for more than two months. When he attempted to return to school for the fall 2011 semester, he discovered that he was anemic and needed to receive nutrients intravenously. The sleep needed for recovery did not come easily.

“I wouldn’t call running around to the doctors and dealing with the hospitals rest,” he says. “The biggest fight you have is staying out...
of the hospital so you can really rest.”

During his hospital stays, he kept in touch with his classmates, teammates and fraternity brothers through text messages and email — not wanting them to see him suffering. When he was feeling stronger, he attended cross-country practices, cheering on his teammates.

“It meant a lot seeing him still support us after he was diagnosed,” says former teammate Tyler Folse (BS ’12). “It motivated us as a team because we knew that no matter what we were going through, it was nothing compared to what he was dealing with. He never uses his situation as an excuse to quit — only as motivation to get back out there to do what he loves, and we all want that for him as well.”

**A Rollercoaster of Emotions**

According to the American Cancer Society, people at high risk for colon cancer are in their 60s, of African-American or Eastern European descent and have a family history of the disease.

Ross is 21 years old, Caucasian and has no family history of colon cancer. His case is so rare that it has spurred a movement of colon cancer testing for younger age groups. Doctors hope that earlier detection and treatment will lead to better long-term outcomes.

“People have become more aware of it since my diagnosis, younger people, too,” Ross says. “That’s something I can feel good about, having possibly saved somebody else from going through this.”

As of now, there’s no set timeline for when Ross will fully recover. In July, doctors found that the cancer cells had returned but are hopeful that they detected them early this time. Ross reminds himself of the quote, “Life can only give a test of a person’s spirit or will, but the person tested is what decides if he passed or failed.” He’s taking it day by day, using his downtime to get together with his family and take stock of the things he can control.

“All I can do is remain positive,” he says, “because I refuse to allow myself to mope around and feel sorry for myself and get worse.”

Ross tries not to place too much pressure on himself, but he hopes to return to school and the track. Not once, during the most strenuous test of his life, has he given up hope that a sense of normalcy will return.

“I’ve always believed that if you never test yourself, you’re not going to go as far as you could,” he says. “I want to go as far as I can. I plan on joining as much as possible at Nicholls because I want to repay them for what they’ve done for me.”

Ross credits Nicholls and the Department of Athletics for handling his situation with respect and care — helping him with classes, lending their support, allowing him to keep his scholarship while attempting his comeback.

Of all the metaphors that could be used to sum up Ross’ life at this juncture, the grueling, winding long-distance race seems to fit best.

“I feel that it has been like a race, and although it didn’t start out so well, I think it’s starting to come together,” Ross says. “I don’t just want to be good for a short time, then relapse; I want to be able to outrun this thing for good, with no regrets.” — Clyde Verdin Jr.
Many of us consider our Nicholls experiences some of the most memorable times of our lives. To reconnect and support your alma mater:

- Join the Nicholls Alumni Federation. For only $25 a year, you’ll help fund student scholarships, alumni events and campus traditions such as Homecoming. To join, visit nichollsalumni.org or call 985-448-4111.

- Keep Nicholls updated. Let us know where you’re working and what you’re accomplishing. Email us at alumniaffairs@nicholls.edu.

- Come back to Nicholls for an event or campus tour. We hope to see you at the 2012 Homecoming on Oct. 13.
The day Dylan came to Nicholls

by Dr. John P. Doucet

Remember the day Bob Dylan came to Nicholls?
When miles of cars sat idle on highways 1, 20 and 308, waiting to crawl onto Acadia Drive or Audubon Avenue while the once-lively arms of University Police officers directed traffic all day? When cars of fans tried to fit compactly and squarely between the suddenly meaningless white lines on parking lots — or on grass fields that would one day become parking lots? When thousands attempted to catch a glimpse or even an echo of the great Dylan belting out “Like a Rolling Stone” or “Positively 4th Street” or “Highway 61 Revisited” in Guidry Stadium?
Remember that day?
Of course you don’t. That day never happened.
No, his Live at Budokan album was not recorded nearby at Boudreaux’s Can, that infamous and ill-fated watering hole in downtown Chackbay. Rather, it was recorded in 1978 in Japan. And no, the legendary “Big Pink,” the house where he rehearsed with his famous backing group, The Band, was not the monumental Dansereau House in downtown Thibodaux. Rather, “Big Pink” was in upstate New York, and that was in the early ’70s.
But Dylan did come to Nicholls. Only he didn’t come to play music. He came to find it.
In the spring of 1988, Dylan was recording in New Orleans with producer Daniel Lanois, known for worldwide hits such as U2’s The Joshua Tree. As Dylan tells in his memoir, Chronicles, Volume One (published in 2004), he, Lanois and musicians holed up not far from Audubon Park in “a large Victorian mansion” that had been refurbished into an impromptu recording studio.
Although enchanted with walking the streets of uptown at dusk, where “the air was murky and intoxicating” (which probably reminded him of the ’60s) and where “you can almost hear the heavy breathing” of ghosts racing from neighborhood cemeteries (which was probably his own heavy breathing — a consequence of the ’60s), Dylan was “feeling stuffy” and decided that he “needed to get out of town.”
That’s when he jumped on a borrowed Harley, made his way across the river at the Huey P. Long Bridge and headed west along U.S. Highway 90. Although not told in Chronicles, he likely stopped at roadside vendors along the way to snack on tamales in Avondale, fresh-picked satsumas in Boutte or monster strawberries outside of Des Allemands. Because the Harley had no refrigeration, he likely zoomed past the fresh seafood trucks, perhaps too frightened by the thought of what “fat crabs” might look like.
When he reached the crossroads at Bayou Lafourche, he needed to decide on a direction. Of course, the answer was in the wind, and he didn’t need a weatherman to know which way it blew. He turned north.
“The town has a lot of streets with tree names,” Dylan remembers about Thibodaux. “… we cruised along Pecan Street, then over to St. Joseph’s Church, which is modeled after one in Des Allemands. Because the Harley had no refrigeration, he likely stopped at roadside vendors along the way to snack on tamales in Avondale, fresh-picked satsumas in Boutte or monster strawberries outside of Des Allemands. Because the Harley had no refrigeration, he likely zoomed past the fresh seafood trucks, perhaps too frightened by the thought of what “fat crabs” might look like.
When he reached the crossroads at Bayou Lafourche, he needed to decide on a direction. Of course, the answer was in the wind, and he didn’t need a weatherman to know which way it blew. He turned north.
“The town has a lot of streets with tree names,” Dylan remembers about Thibodaux. “… we cruised along Pecan Street, then over to St. Joseph’s Church, which is modeled after one in Paris or Rome. Nicholls State University, the poor man’s Harvard, is just up the street.”
“Harvard on the Bayou” has been the nickname of Nicholls since the early ’60s. Someone coined the now-legendary phrase as a reflection of high-quality academic programs, professors and graduates of the university — some legendary in their own rights. Those of us who purchased “Harvard on the Bayou” T-shirts from the bookstore years ago were always proud to wear them, and we still would be wearing them if only cotton fibers stretched a bit more.
Those shirts and that nickname are meaningful keepsakes to Nicholls students, just like the memory of learning about our university’s good reputation is kept in Dylan’s mind.
Now, I know what you’re saying: Dylan survived the ’60s, and he was probably still celebrating the ’60s when he arrived at Nicholls in the late ’80s. After all, he didn’t get our nickname quite right, and, to be honest, he actually spelled Nicholls with only one “l” on page 200 of Chronicles. But the fact remains that after 60 years, and after the ’60s themselves, the reputation and renown of Nicholls is so strong that it stayed one of the remaining meaningful synapses of Dylan’s brain. And in re-inventing our nickname, Dylan — ever watchful of the life of the workingman — understood the profound reason why our university was even built.
After his Thibodaux revelation, as well as a few more made in Houma, around Lake Verret and at other stops in the university’s service region, Dylan returned to New Orleans. He, Lanois and the boys probably dined on fresh seafood that night, no doubt developing a profound appreciation for fat crabs. In a few weeks, they completed recording Oh Mercy, Dylan’s first critically acclaimed album in many years.
Over the years, hundreds of thousands of people — rolling stones and moss-gatherers alike — have come to Nicholls to find their own music. Positively, there really is a 4th Street in downtown Thibodaux, not too far from the southernmost stretch of the real Highway 61.

Aside from being a poet, writer and editor, Dr. John P. Doucet (BS ’84) holds many titles: dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, distinguished service professor, director of the University Honors Program and Louisiana’s first certified public health geneticist.
As the state’s support for higher education continues to decline, donors are more critical than ever to ensure a strong future for Nicholls State University. The university is grateful for the exceptional generosity of the donors listed below. Their gifts help make it possible to provide current and future students with the best educational experiences possible.

Donations to Nicholls and the Nicholls Foundation during the 2011–12 fiscal year totaled more than $1.7 million. The following list of donors is grouped by giving level as of June 30, 2012. Multiple efforts have been made to publish an accurate, comprehensive list. Please call 985-448-4134 to report an error or omission.

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Entreprenuer honors employees through scholarships

Houma entrepreneur Jerry Ledet made a lot of good business decisions, but he knew that the success of his company, Shield Coat Inc., would not have been possible without key employees. Three of them particularly stood out.

Stewart Lirette had been exposed to Agent Orange in the military, but that didn’t stop the entry-level employee from working his way up to plant manager. Barbara M. Hamm, devoted office manager, was known for running a tight ship and could anticipate what Jerry wanted her to do next and get it done before he asked. Albert Cunningham, a consummate perfectionist, confidently led crews in the French Jordan division, which electronically inspected oilfield pipes.

Over the years, Jerry and his wife, Lola, came up with a unique way to thank these three employees — they created endowed scholarships at Nicholls in each of their names.

“We started giving to Nicholls in the glory days of the oil industry because God has blessed us so much,” Lola says. “We wanted to honor them in a way that would be meaningful. Endowed scholarships are very special because they go on forever. ”

Helping college students has long been one of Jerry’s goals. Although he was offered a baseball scholarship, going to college was one of Jerry’s goals. Although he was offered a baseball scholarship, going to college was not a feasible option. His family couldn’t afford to pay for his living expenses.

Instead, Jerry helped his father, a brick mason and house builder, before finding a job in the oil industry with J. Ray McDermott. “I wanted the big money of the oilfield, and I got it — $50 a week,” he says. Despite his humble beginnings, Jerry went on to start several successful ventures including Shield Coat. The Houma-based company, formed in 1959, coated pipes internally with plastic to keep them from corroding.

Through the years, higher education remained top of mind for Jerry and Lola, a graduate of Baylor University. Both attended night classes at Nicholls and stressed the importance of education to their three daughters.

“My dad looked us three girls in the eyes and said, ‘You will go to college,’” daughter Liz Baker says. “He was very education-oriented and imparted that vision to us as young children. But it didn’t stop within our walls. Once we earned degrees, his vision grew for other people.”

In addition to the money they’ve donated for the three endowed scholarships, the Ledets have also funded an endowed professorship in environmental biology and several individual scholarships.

“As I observed the way Nicholls operated, I was very impressed with the layout of campus and the intelligence and integrity of the staff,” says Jerry.

“And the caliber of a Nicholls degree has grown more meaningful and impressive,” Lola adds.

Married for 54 years, Jerry and Lola, high school sweethearts, practically finish each other’s sentences. Both are fixtures at campus and local events. Five years ago, Jerry sold Shield Coat, but he keeps active with his church and as an industry adviser.

“I still do much consulting — mostly with my wife,” Jerry says as both he and Lola laugh.

They are proud of the life they’ve been able to build together — knowing that more students now have the opportunity to attend Nicholls and that the legacies of Lirette and Hamm, both deceased, and Cunningham, now a consultant, will live on forever.

— Stephanie Detillier
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HELPING STUDENTS HIT THE HIGHEST NOTE

Nicholls students learn, practice and perform exclusively on Steinway & Sons pianos thanks to money raised through the Nicholls Foundation. Now that Nicholls has become the first public Louisiana university to achieve All-Steinway status, our next big project is a complete renovation of the Mary M. Danos Theater in Talbot Hall.

Help contribute to this project, student scholarships and other university initiatives by joining the Nicholls Foundation or by using the envelope in this magazine to make a donation.

For more details about how you can leave a legacy at Nicholls, call 985-448-4134 or visit nicholls.edu/development.
Voilà!
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