MEDICAL CAREERS BEGIN HERE

8 Nicholls-trained doctors reveal their toughest cases

EVERY DAY IS FAT TUESDAY FOR ART ALUM

MEET

The new NICHOLLS PRESIDENT, PAGE 3
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A 47-YEAR university employee, PAGE 18

FALL 2013
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THEY GOT THEIR START HERE

The Nicholls pre-medicine program has garnered a reputation for helping students get into medical school and go on to successful medical careers. Eight Nicholls-bred doctors discuss their most challenging cases.

by Stephanie Detillier Verdin

A COASTAL EXPEDITION

Each fall, a new crop of Nicholls biology graduate students heads down to Cocodrie for Calypseaux — a weekend retreat that immerses them in South Louisiana culture.

by Misty Leigh McElroy

FOR MARK OLIVIER, IT’S MARDI GRAS EVERY DAY

Carnival season never ends at Blaine Kern Studios, where Nicholls graduate Mark Olivier leads the talented team of artists who bring Mardi Gras to life.

by Stephanie Detillier Verdin
On the sidelines of a Colonel soccer match in late October, the incoming Nicholls president walks through the crowd without attracting much attention. Wearing a university baseball cap and a Nicholls tee pulled over his dress shirt, he reaches for his long-lens camera and starts photographing the action. Only two weeks have passed since he was selected for the job, but he already looks like he belongs here. Like he is proud of this place.

“I hear it’s been quite a season,” he says of the soccer team’s then-undefeated run. “I coached my daughter’s soccer team to a perfect season once — 0-8 — we lost every game. When they called for dads to participate, I thought I’d be putting out the orange cones, not coaching.” He laughs at the memory then goes back to cheering on his new team — the Colonels.

Meet Dr. Bruce T. Murphy, the fifth president of Nicholls. He’s a retired lieutenant colonel who served 23 years in the U.S. Army. He’s a five-time college graduate who attended some of the nation’s most elite universities. He’s an accomplished academian who’s been a leadership and management professor, a business school dean and, most recently, a vice president of academic affairs.

But beyond his resume, he’s a down-to-earth man who loves bragging about his wife, enjoys a nice round of golf and carries a black and red backpack rather than a briefcase. Not the stereotypically rigid military-type or stuffy administrator, Murphy can tell adventure stories for days about the pancake breakfast he worked with John Wayne, his trip to the British School of Falconry and the time he competed on Cross-Wits, a nationally televised game show.

“You know, I anticipate that I’ll be at Nicholls long enough to tell many of these stories for years to come. You don’t want to get them all at the same time, do you?” he teases before revealing that he and celebrity partner Betty White won the final round of Cross-Wits. His prize package? A portable dishwashing machine, two suitcases, a Polaroid camera and a trip to the Virgin Islands … for one. “I went, but it was terrible,” he says with a laugh.

Murphy grew up in Encino, Calif., where dinner conversations often revolved around which celebrity his mother had run into at the grocery store that day. Despite his proximity to Hollywood, he led a pretty typical childhood — participating in Boy Scout activities and playing high school varsity football. His dream was to earn an English degree, serve two years in the Army and then become a high school teacher and coach.

A quite unusual college experience, however, shifted his career path. Murphy began his studies at the University of San Francisco, then moved back home to attend junior college, before finally landing at the University of California, Berkeley.

“In those four years, I lived in a dorm, at home, in an apartment and in a fraternity house; I had the whole gamut of student experiences,” he says. “Interestingly, I pledged a fraternity as a senior and was elected president. It was very bizarre but fun.”

During his senior year in Berkeley’s ROTC, Murphy qualified for an Army fellowship that would pay his way to graduate school.

“I was definitely not thinking of graduate school at the time, but it was just a deal I couldn’t pass up, and the Army kept offering me opportunities like that,” he recalls. “I didn’t say, ‘Hey, I think I’ll spend the next 20 years of my life in the Army.’ It just happened and seemed to pass by very quickly.”

During his Army career, Murphy spent nine years on college campuses — as either a student or professor — and another nine years serving overseas, mostly in Germany and Central America. His stint also included assignments with Reagan’s Presidential Inauguration Committee and at the Pentagon, where he met his wife, Jeanne, a U.S. Army colonel and former international athlete.

For the past couple of years, Murphy has been searching for an opportunity at the next level — a university presidency. From the moment he and Jeanne stepped foot on the Thibodaux campus, they sensed something different. They noticed a unique university culture where people were proud of their work and their region.

“Being named president was a moment I’ll treasure forever,” he says. “I’ve had people tell me, ‘When it’s right, you’ll know it, and they’ll know it. At Nicholls, it certainly feels that way to me.” — Stephanie Detillier Verdin
How can Louisiana restore its barrier islands in a way that not only offers more storm protection for the coast but also protects the island habitats of hundreds of wetland species? Dr. Aaron Pierce, assistant professor of biological sciences, is helping conservationists come closer to answering that question.

On the Isles Dernieres Barrier Island Refuge, south of Cocodrie, he and his graduate students band different waterbird species, such as the Royal Terns and Sandwich Terns pictured, and track their birth rates as well as how many return to the islands each year. Last spring, Pierce captured a Royal Tern that already had a leg band. Initially, he thought it was one of the chicks he had tagged in a previous year. But further research indicated that the bird had been banded as a chick in North Carolina in 1986. At 26 years old, the bird was still breeding.

— Photo by Dr. Aaron Pierce

During the fall 2012 semester, a group of Nicholls geomatics students partnered with the Thibodaux Police Department to help track crime patterns and improve community safety. The students went through more than 24,000 crime reports since 2006 — geocoding the address of each incident, plotting it on a map and categorizing what occurred (traffic violation, robbery, auto accident, etc.). The end result was a spatial analysis that illustrated incident hot spots and trends over time. The students also recommended changes in how officers record incidents so that, for example, child sexual abuse isn’t plotted at schools (where the crime is often reported) but where the abuse actually occurred. Dr. Balaji Ramachandran, geomatics department head, says data-driven projects like this one are being used more often to help police departments allocate their resources to the heaviest incident areas, hopefully preventing crimes and accidents from occurring.
More than 500 cookbooks cram the shelves of Marcelle Bienvenu’s home office. Some she collected while researching South Louisiana cuisine for Time-Life Books. Dozens of others were mailed to her by publishers after she began co-authoring *New York Times* best-sellers with Emeril Lagasse. She also inherited a good chunk of her collection from her mother, who had accumulated various cookbooks from local church groups and the Junior League.

With hundreds of resources at hand and with her family’s culinary traditions as inspiration, Bienvenu never runs out of recipe ideas. The St. Martinville native was seemingly born with the ingredients to become a cookbook author and food columnist.

“Where I really learned how to cook was at my dad’s elbow with a cast-iron pot over a wood-fire stove,” says Bienvenu, a Chef John Folse Culinary Institute instructor. “There was no knob for medium heat; you learned to move the pot halfway off the fire.”

Her father’s family owned and published the *Teche News*, leading Bienvenu to pursue a feature-writing job with *The Times-Picayune*. In the 1970s, she shifted her focus to culinary research.

“I really became intrigued by the differences in what people in New Orleans ate and the food that our family ate in the country,” says Bienvenu, who still writes a weekly column, “Creole Cooking,” for the *Picayune*.

After working in public relations and catering for restaurants such as Commander’s Palace and K-Paul’s Louisiana Kitchen, Bienvenu delved into her family’s cooking style and published her first cookbook, *Who’s Your Mama, Are You Catholic and Can You Make a Roux*? in 1991. Since then, she’s authored several more of her own, in addition to co-authoring mainstream titles.

“I learned quickly to write and talk like Emeril,” says Bienvenu, who worked with the famous chef in his home kitchen, perfecting recipes for four of his cookbooks. “The man can cook, but he can’t measure to save his life!”

Cookbook writing can be a time-consuming art with lots of failed recipe attempts and plenty of dirty dishes. But it certainly has its perks. For *Abita Beer, Cooking Louisiana True*, crates of different Abita beers were delivered to her home for recipe testing. For *Cooking Up a Storm*, Bienvenu helped *Times-Picayune* readers find recipes they had lost in Hurricane Katrina. And for *True Blood: Eats, Drinks, and Bites from Bon Temps*, she spent research hours watching every episode of HBO’s *True Blood*.

But her favorite recipes are still those rural Cajun ones she preserved from her family.

“I tell my students, you better ask your grandmaw today for her recipes, and follow her around the kitchen writing down what she does.”

— Sarah Baudoin and Stephanie Detillier Verdin

### Bienvenu’s go-to cookbooks

1. **Mastering the Art of French Cooking**  
   By Julia Child  
   Wonderful for referencing classic French techniques.

2. **The Picayune’s Creole Cook Book**  
   By *The Times-Picayune*  
   First published in 1906; a great look at New Orleans’ culinary history.

3. **James Beard cookbook collection**  
   By James Beard  
   Filled with American recipes that have evolved from the 1950s and ’60s.

4. **Country Weekends, Country Desserts** and any other Lee Bailey cookbook  
   By Lee Bailey  
   Helpful for planning menus for entertaining.
Life’s a dance

To the pulsing sounds of a boom box, Stephen Pham moves his body rapidly in front of the quad’s eternal flame. His hands push and pull in mime-like motions as his legs twist and bend effortlessly.

Primarily self-taught, the 22-year-old started dancing at age 10. Since then, he has won several competitions, from the National Panhellenic Council talent show at Nicholls to dance battles in Louisiana, Texas and Missouri. He’s a regular at the university’s RELATE open-mic nights and has collaborated with Brandon Harrell and Emilio Dosal, members of I.aM.mE., Season 6 winners of America’s Best Dance Crew.

“All my dances — performances, battles and what not — they’re all free-style. They’re all based on how I feel,” he says.

More than 4,600 people have subscribed to Pham’s YouTube channel, featuring almost 100 videos filmed on campus, around his hometown of Houma and elsewhere. He considers his video collection an “open journal,” one that he will enjoy looking back on as he gets older.

“If it weren’t for dance, I don’t know what I’d be doing,” he says. “I don’t even know if I’d be in college. I don’t know if I would be able to pass college classes. It really keeps me motivated.”

Although he’s not sure exactly what he’ll do after graduation, he plans to use his marketing degree to continue promoting his stage name, Phamish, by traveling, performing and meeting new people.

Foraging for edible treasures

A hobby of necessity, he calls it. An early riser with a busy schedule, Chef Jean Pierre “J.P.” Daigle fills his coffee cup and sets off on his quest, usually returning before anyone else has awakened. His tools: a basket for collecting and a walking stick for prying his finds from their woody mantels.

Self-taught in the field of mushroom study, or mycology, Daigle, a culinary arts instructor, considers the quest for fungi something of a treasure hunt. And, he enjoys sharing his knowledge with students eager to learn a little of what has taken him years to acquire.

Although he originally studied music education and directed choirs, Daigle grew up with a love for nature and cooking. His grandfather was a farmer; his father, a product of post-depression conservatism, taught him never to waste. Their meals often consisted of wild game, whatever was fresh in the garden and edibles that could be foraged, such as mushrooms — what Cajuns called “champignons.”

“My father would tell me stories of walking in the swamp to our deer stand and bringing along a bread bag to fill with fresh mushrooms if the deer hunt was a bust,” recalls Daigle, who grew up on 27 acres in Gonzales.

When Daigle arrived at the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute three years ago, word of his mushroom hobby got out fast, and curious students began stopping by his office. Depending on interest and weather, Daigle plans four or five foraging trips each year with student foodies.

Early on a misty morning, the team ventures out. On a good hunt, they might harvest oyster, purple puffballs or Judas’ Ear mushrooms. If they’re lucky, they’ll collect some of Daigle’s favorite, the golden chanterelle variety, found at the base of live oaks on the fertile grounds of plantations, churches, and sometimes, universities.

— Debbie Papa Kliebert

Consumption of some wild mushrooms can cause serious, even fatal results. Chef Daigle strongly recommends that home cooks use only mushrooms purchased from reliable outlets.
Look who’s coming to Nicholls

The number of highly recruited, overachieving high school seniors who make Nicholls their university of choice might surprise you. Each fall, the admissions office brings in a diverse group of talented freshmen with high aspirations. Here’s a glimpse at six of our new, promising Colonels and what attracted them to Nicholls:

Kaylee Cole, biology/pre-med major from Raceland
“I wanted a place I could call home, a university where people would care about me as a person, not just a student. As a pre-med major, I know I’ll be taking difficult classes, and at Nicholls, the professors are so willing to help. When it came down to making my college decision, I felt I could have more success at Nicholls.”

Keating McFarland, culinary arts major from Mount Desert, Maine
“I looked at big culinary schools in the Northeast, but I wanted a change of scenery. Plus, I’ve been a trumpet player for 10 years, so I asked my guidance counselor to look for schools where I could pursue culinary and music. I love the atmosphere down here — great food, great music, diverse people.”

Camille Comeaux, biology/pre-dentistry major from Baton Rouge
“I narrowed my college list down to small schools, and when I toured Nicholls, I fell in love with how friendly the people were. It’s also neat because Gouaux Hall is named after my great-grandfather and its auditorium is named after my grandfather. I think they would be tickled to know that I’m now a Nicholls student.”

Marina Lilly, business administration major from Dallas
“It came down to three schools, and Nicholls had everything I was looking for — a friendly environment, small class sizes and a successful women’s basketball program that wasn’t too far away from home but not too close either.”

James LeBlanc, finance major from Bourg
“I applied to two other larger universities, but I decided on Nicholls because of its affordability and its business school accreditation, which is a really big thing. I also own my own business, Elite Home and Lawn Care, so I’ll be able to continue doing that while earning my degree.”

Tyler Chiasson, athletic training major from Morgan City
“After serving in the U.S. Air Force for six years, I worked offshore for a few months and then realized that I wanted to take advantage of my military benefits to attend college. Nicholls was not only close to home but also offered a welcoming environment for veterans — from social events to help with scheduling classes.”
THE HULBERT YEARS
A look back at the 10-year presidency of Dr. Stephen T. Hulbert

A campus under construction:

- 6 new buildings constructed
- 52 buildings renovated
- 5 buildings demolished

159 new Nicholls-branded street signs

1st Louisiana university campus to become tobacco-free

6 Swamp Stomp Festivals

IMPACT OF NEW SELECTIVE ADMISSIONS POLICY

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>43.3%</td>
<td>2006 freshman</td>
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Out with the old

In with the new

11,384 degrees awarded

38 commencement ceremonies
Stormy times

5 tropical storms

5 hurricanes

1 oil spill

3,500 evacuees housed at Nicholls following Hurricane Katrina

21 new Steinway pianos: Nicholls is the only All-Steinway School among public Louisiana universities.

MANNING PASSING ACADEMY

8 years at Nicholls

1,200 high school campers per year

4 Mannings

1 new AstroTurf® field

$1.5 million economic impact each summer

BUDGET challenges

2003-04

45% self-generated funds

2012-13

65% self-generated funds

University’s 1st Southland Conference football championship (2005 season)

> $52 million in university scholarships awarded to students

2012

Nicholls Online launched with 7 completely online degrees

$11.6 million in research and grant funds generated

32,000+ cans donated to area food banks through Nicholls CAN! campaign

$1.5 million economic impact each summer

Voilà! The Magazine of Nicholls State University
From playing across the seven seas to teaching at Nicholls, Joshua Hollenbeck has had a globe-trotting musical career that's taken him from Tobago to Thibodaux.

Now in his third year as an instructor of music and assistant director of bands at Nicholls, Hollenbeck directs the Pride of Nicholls Marching Band, the 6th Man Basketball Band and the Jazz Ensemble. Before his career in education, he cruised the world with Royal Caribbean, Celebrity and Carnival cruise lines — sometimes spending as much as seven months at sea while performing in the premier show band and visiting countless locations in North and South America, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and India.

— Nikki Buskey

**What was it like working on a cruise ship?**
I played in the show band, which is usually made up of college-educated and trained musicians. These are guys at the peak of professionalism because we have to be well-versed in different musical styles and do a lot of sight reading. Living on the ship is very much like living in a freshman dorm. You're usually paired up with someone else who does the same job as you, and it is very close quarters. The best thing is the travel. In the same week, I saw the Roman Colosseum, the Sistine Chapel and the Parthenon.

**What's the worst part of the job?**
Things happen at the same time every day on a cruise ship, so your day is very planned. You don't get the kind of freedom and uncertainty most musicians are used to on land. That and the food in the crew mess hall.

**How do you select the music the Nicholls band plays at games and halftime?**
I write all the arrangements myself. I play in a few cover bands in the area, and that gives me inspiration. I adapt popular music and stick to things that are fun to keep the crowd engaged.

**Who are your musical inspirations?**
Dean Donataggio, my high school band director — he taught us first and foremost you have to be musical — and my collegiate saxophone instructor at Florida State University, Patrick Meighan. But most of all, my parents. When I played in high school, they weren't pushy, but they knew this could be something for me and they supported me.

**Who is your dream band to work with?**
I would love to work with the Marsalis family, Harry Connick Jr. or Rebirth Brass Band.
A personal quest to stop abuse

At 17, Alicia C. Kozak broke up with her steady boyfriend after months of being emotionally, physically and sexually abused. But it wasn’t until months later, while working on a teen dating-violence project, that she realized she could use her experience to help others.

During her project presentation, Kozak described the struggles of an abused young woman, only revealing afterward that the story was hers. Now, Kozak (BA ’12), a clinical mental health counseling graduate student, encourages domestic violence survivors to seek professional help as she did.

The aspiring counselor has been vocal at local candlelight vigils and in front of the Louisiana Legislature, where she spoke in support of a bill requiring dating-violence awareness programs in middle and high schools.

...continued on page 12

Nursing instincts kick in early

Heidi Rodrigue was mentally preparing for the first big challenge of her nursing studies — clinicals, when she would work with real patients for the first time.

Unexpectedly, before the Nicholls sophomore even set foot in a hospital, her medical knowledge was put to the test when a fellow nursing major suffered a life-threatening emergency.

Before the Sept. 14 Colonels football game against the Ragin’ Cajuns, Rodrigue and her friends were leaving her cousin’s Lafayette apartment when Breely Danos, a Nicholls freshman, suddenly passed out. Rodrigue’s nursing instincts immediately kicked in.

“I assessed her condition and started talking to her,” Rodrigue says. “It seemed like she might be dehydrated.”

Danos told her friends that her chest hurt, and her breathing became labored. One friend called 911, and Rodrigue contacted Danos’ mother.

Inside the apartment, Danos passed out again — and this time she wasn’t breathing. Danos was suffering from a pulmonary embolism, a blood clot that had traveled to her lungs.

Brayeah Alleman, a Nicholls interdisciplinary studies freshman, attempted CPR on Danos and then called Rodrigue to take over.

“It’s kind of crazy because I just snapped into nursing mode,” Rodrigue says. “I had to take CPR classes over the summer to prepare for clinicals. I did my best — and luckily it worked.”

Rodrigue revived Danos before emergency officials arrived. They determined that without CPR, Danos would have died. She spent the next nine days in the hospital, but she has since fully recovered and returned to school.

Danos doesn’t remember anything from that day, but she’s glad Rodrigue and Alleman, her sorority sisters, were there to help her.

A week after Danos’ emergency, Rodrigue says one of her nursing lessons centered on recognizing and treating a pulmonary embolism.

“I was like, ‘We couldn’t have learned this a week ago?’” she laughs.

Rodrigue, who began clinicals at Leonard J. Chabert Medical Center in Houma in October, says she’s more prepared than ever for her future profession. — Nikki Buskey

Colonels in the community

DORM DONATIONS
During the May 2013 move-out week, the Nicholls Office of Housing and Residence Life collected students’ unwanted lamps, refrigerators, clothing, nonperishable food items and other belongings and donated them to the Salvation Army and local food banks.

GRAVESITE CLEANUP
For their Greek Week 2013 service project, fraternity and sorority members visited St. John’s Episcopal Church Cemetery, where the university’s eponym — Francis T. Nicholls — and his family members are buried. The students pressure-washed the Nicholls family’s graves, pulled weeds, applied a fresh coat of paint and left behind flowers.

BATTING FOR CANCER
For the past three years, the Colonel baseball team has hosted a Bat Against Breast Cancer Pink Game to raise money for Susan G. Komen. Players also visit Thibodaux Regional Medical Center cancer patients, engaging them in conversation and bringing them Colonel gear.

The Magazine of Nicholls State University
Local musician studies athletic concussions

For John Daigle (BS ’13), music and medicine go hand-in-hand. Whether playing just the right song to satisfy a crowd or helping the injured or concussed, the recent grad hopes to positively affect those around him. And he’s off to a solid start.

With an interest sparked by his high school football career, Daigle researched a hot topic for his university honors thesis: sports-related concussions. From little league to the NFL, everyone is concerned about when it’s safe for an athlete who suffered a concussion to return to the playing field.

With help from Thibodaux Regional Medical Center, Daigle used a Computerized Dynamic Posturography machine to measure different components of balance in both concussed and non-concussed athletes.

“Even though concussed individuals may appear ready to get back on the field, they oftentimes still have impairments to their balance,” Daigle says. “It’s easy to spot a broken leg and know that the person is injured, but the brain is very tricky because it is harder to detect how badly injured a person really is.”

An athlete can typically return to the field after being asymptomatic for at least a week, Daigle learned, but the severity of the concussion also dictates the time needed to heal.

Daigle’s research will come in handy as he spends the next year preparing for the medical school entrance exam, but he’s doing more than studying these days. Daigle’s acoustical guitar and singing talents have taken him to watering holes and venues from Baton Rouge to New Orleans and back to his hometown of Thibodaux. For the past three years, he’s been playing indie/folk rock, mixed with a few original songs.

While “Wagon Wheel” and “Don’t Stop Believin’” are guaranteed crowd-pleasers, one of Daigle’s favorite things to do is take popular songs from various genres and turn them into an easy acoustic sound. “Whether it be a career in the health care profession or playing music for people, I hope to continue to make a difference in the lives of others,” Daigle says. — Jacqueline Weimer

One year of hitting the gym

Since opening its doors in September 2012, the Harold J. Callais Student Recreation Center has become the epicenter of campus life.

- 869 Average weekday attendance
- 141,455 People who have used the facility
- Body Pump Most popular group exercise class
- March 4, 2013 Busiest day since opening (1,256 users)

- Monday Busiest day of the week
- Saturday Slowest day of the week
- 706 Graduates from 2003-present who activated their membership
- 1,150 Smoothies purchased from Freshens smoothie bar

The Fiddler of Driskill Hill

With levee bonfires, Grand Isle beaches and other iconic Louisiana landscapes as a backdrop, Dr. David Middleton reflects on life’s great questions in The Fiddler of Driskill Hill — his fourth full-length poetry book published by LSU Press, an unprecedented accomplishment for a single poet. Middleton, professor emeritus of English and poet-in-residence, has filled this 100-page collection with graceful musings on family, love, tragedy, loneliness and death. In his title poem, a mysterious fiddler climbs the highest point in Louisiana, Driskill Hill, to “Sing what is and ought to be.” In another poem, a woman bids farewell to her beloved family home; before leaving she “Must walk one final time these rooms I share/With ghosts that speak and breathe in memory’s breathless air.” — Stephanie Detillier Verdin
Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program

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LIFELONG
Tucked away on a run-of-the-mill residential street in Vacherie is a charming French-Creole cottage with a rich past.

Built in 1835 and purchased by Philippe Desire LeBlanc in 1863 for his bride, Adelaide, Desire Plantation House was owned by LeBlanc’s descendants until 1980 — when Mike and Claudette Davis purchased the 145-year-old extreme fixer-upper.

Mike, the university’s assistant vice president for facilities, has overseen countless building renovations, new construction and demolition projects during his nearly 30-year tenure at Nicholls, so tackling such a daunting restoration project was familiar territory.

Mike traces his love for vintage architecture back to his student days at Nicholls, where he met his future wife. A native of New Orleans, Mike came to Thibodaux to play baseball and study business. Claudette, who had a passion for dance and a love of antiques, made the short trip to campus from St. James Parish to study art and English.
“My love for antiques, that later grew into historical renovation, started when I saw a beautiful young lady at Nicholls,” Mike says. “I found out that she liked antiques, so I played like I liked them too, just to get in good with her.”

Mike and Claudette were married in 1972 and began restoring Desire, their lifelong labor of love, eight years later.

“I still laugh at the thought of Mike, a true city boy, settling in my hometown. I think he really likes living in the country,” Claudette says. “We enjoy going on treasure hunts in New Orleans’ salvage yards and working on restoring the house together.”

Preserving the original design of the house, which was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986, was important to the Davises. Each step of the ongoing project has been deliberate — the result of countless hours spent researching period architecture and collecting antique building supplies and furnishings.

“I intentionally left the exposed bousillage [insulation] and used the original paint colors — white with dark green and brick red,” Mike says. “We even researched the type of paint that was used during that period and created just the right shade of red by grinding brick and adding it to the paint.”

While painting the front porch, Mike discovered a bullet imbedded in the doorframe. Not exactly sure how or why it landed there, Mike says: “I like to imagine it was a fierce shootout between the North and the South, but honestly the homeowner could have been cleaning his gun on the front porch and it was accidentally discharged. I guess we’ll never know.”

More than three decades have passed since the Davises purchased the cottage. And, despite several additions and modifications, their work is far from over.

“In the early ‘80s, when we first moved into the house, there was so much to be done,” Mike recalls. “After work and on weekends, we worked on restoring the house. During that time, we lived in the small back section, and our kids, Keith and Lenna, who were only 8 and 5 at the time, thought it was great to sleep in sleeping bags on the floor!”

Over the years, baseball games and dance performances took priority over renovations, so work on the house would stop and start according to the kids’ schedules.

Now that Keith and Lenna have families of their own, the Davises spend most of their downtime completing the last major renovation to the house — a larger dining room where the entire family, which now includes four grandchildren, can gather for meals.

Mike believes in the old saying that you should always leave a place better than you found it. He has certainly done that at Nicholls. The impact Mike has had on campus is on display for all to see — award-winning renovations, state-of-the-art auditoriums and four new residence halls. The list goes on and on.

And the impact he’s had on Desire Plantation House is no less impressive. The LeBlanc family clearly left their historical cottage in exceptionally capable hands. — Renee Piper
Nurturer of Nicholls nurses

Right outside the elevator doors, on the third floor of Betsy Cheramie Ayo Hall, Rebecca Lyons steps into a small lobby lined with composite photos of Nicholls nurses. It’s a powerful glimpse at the generations of RNs the university has prepared — from the class of 1986 to present. For Lyons, it’s also a place of deep pride.

As a former intensive care unit nurse, she worked alongside many of the graduates pictured. As the Nicholls nursing department head, she has taught even more of them. And, as she sometimes points out to students, she’s on the wall herself — look in the 1986 frame, bottom row, fourth from right. Her hair color is different, she says with a laugh, but not much else has changed.

“I thought I was going to live and die as an ICU nurse. I loved every second of it,” Lyons says. “I never thought I’d go into higher education, but it’s been an incredible experience. To work with students whose whole careers are in front of them is so fulfilling but also intense. Some days, taking on seven open-heart surgeries by myself would be easier than this job.”

Lyons describes her 12 years in Terrebonne General Medical Center’s ICU as “crazy-busy” but exhilarating. Her husband, Tommy, kept things together while the mother of two worked countless days, nights, holidays and weekends. One fateful shift, Lyons decided she wanted more out of her nursing career. She enrolled in an online graduate program and earned her master’s degree, opening the door to a new career path.

Since joining the Nicholls faculty in 2000, Lyons has approached teaching the same way she approached nursing: with a relentless attention to detail, professionalism and good bedside — or deskside — manner. She doesn’t take herself too seriously and infuses humor whenever possible. She believes in the power of being nice and having a positive outlook.

“I have a rule here. You have two minutes to complain a day,” says Lyons, who became department head in 2005. “Get it out of your system and then move on to something more productive.”

The consummate perfectionist says she gets her work ethic from her mother, who worked relentlessly and raised four children on her own after Lyons’ father passed away when Lyons was only 6.

“I learned to do things well the first time because I may never have a second chance,” she says.

“I thought I was going to live and die as an ICU nurse. I loved every second of it.”

When the workaholic Lyons isn’t in Ayo Hall, she enjoys attempting to grow tomatoes, collecting dishes and china patterns to fill her 8-foot armoire and many kitchen hutches, and “keeping house” at her restored 1869 Creole cottage in Thibodaux. She says cleaning house is her therapy, but when she really needs to unwind, she heads to the Lyons family camp on Four Point Bayou in Dulac with Tommy, her husband of 28 years; Dave, her entrepreneurial-minded son; and Katherine, her daughter who’s an art senior at Nicholls.

Looking back, Lyons isn’t sure why she decided to major in nursing or how she became head of the department where she was once a student, but she believes in the forces of destiny.

“In the ICU, you witness people who should’ve died and didn’t, and you witness people who shouldn’t have died and did,” she says. “In our youth, we try to figure out why, but with time, we learn that things happen for a reason and we can’t question it. So we just do the best that we can. Things find us, and I guess nursing found me.” — Stephanie Detillier Verdin
At just 9 years old, New Iberia native David Boudreaux found himself living in France and enjoying one of his first classical French dinners with his parents. Fancy, right?

But then came immediate disgust and dread. “Imagine the absolute revulsion I feel when I see a tray of snails,” Boudreaux recalls, “and then discovering that escargot is one of the most wonderful dishes I had ever experienced.”

As the youngster bravely conquered his plate of snails, he began breaking down those innate barriers that often keep us from embracing the unknown. Without realizing it, Boudreaux set in motion a lifelong desire to seek new experiences and appreciate things that might seem unappetizing on the surface.

“During the first 17 years of my life, I lived in three foreign countries and six states, but I was totally unaware that that was not normal,” says the executive director of the Nicholls Foundation. “Travel, especially from a young age, helps open our eyes to new ways of doing things, but it’s only later in life that you realize how that shaped you as a person.”

Back then, the globe-trotting Boudreaux never envisioned settling down in Thibodaux and spending 47 years in one place as a professor, department head, dean and vice president. But as the recent retiree reflects back, it’s clear that his worldly childhood and military experiences set him up perfectly for each role at Nicholls.

The life-defining early years
Most of Boudreaux’s educational milestones happened across the world from the university he’d later help shape. The son of a career U.S. Army officer, Boudreaux learned to read in Panama, rode to elementary school in an Army ambulance while in
France and finished high school in Saigon, Vietnam.

An ever-changing home address didn’t faze Boudreaux; in fact, it helped him meet his future wife, Carol Defelice. “She was president of the student council at Thibodaux High and felt she had a role in welcoming new students,” recalls Boudreaux, who moved to Thibodaux for his junior year. Just a year later, he was on the move again, joining his father in Saigon, but Boudreaux and Defelice kept in touch, exchanging letters during their senior year and dating throughout college.

When he enrolled at Louisiana State University in 1961, pre-med — not English — was his major. Ironically, English had never been Boudreaux’s strong suit, but his college literature classes lured him in with their provocative open discussions and engaged faculty. His career path quickly changed.

Right after earning his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from LSU, a shortage of English instructors led Boudreaux to Nicholls in January 1967. But he could only stay for a semester because he was set to begin two years of active-duty military service in May.

“I grew up in an environment in which service to one’s country was a rite of passage,” he says. “Something I think this country lacks today is the sense that we owe service to our country before we exploit the many benefits this country offers.”

Boudreaux was honored when he received orders to attend Defensive Information School before shipping out to Vietnam. Originally, he was training to be a tank platoon leader, but now he’d get the chance to serve his country through public affairs and journalism. Four weeks before his schooling, he spoke with a young captain who had just returned from the same training.

“He asked me, ‘How many words a minute can you type?’ I said, ‘Well, my wife types all my papers for me.’ He said, ‘You’ll never make it then. You’ll fail if you can’t type 18-20 words a minute.’”

Determined to be successful, Boudreaux drove from his base in Fort Rucker, Ala., to Thibodaux, where he picked up his wife’s manual typewriter and began practicing four to five hours each night.

In his class of about 50 at Defensive Information School, he finished third. But his dedication and impressive finish didn’t matter once he reached Vietnam. At the time, the military didn’t need public information officers; it needed soldiers for the Phoenix Program — new units that were tasked with finding and capturing suspected Viet Congs. Depression and dread set in as Boudreaux prepared to do the unthinkable.

But life had other plans for Boudreaux. One day during his unit meeting, a commander asked if anyone had experience or interest in information services. Boudreaux’s hand shot up into the air. “My handprint is probably still on the ceiling of that room,” he says.

In his new role, Boudreaux wrote information brochures advising soldiers on how to manage their money, avoid scams and spend their recreational time. He traveled to Singapore, Tokyo and other exotic locations to write about his firsthand experiences. He edited a weekly newspaper for American soldiers and wrote a column on Vietnam’s religions, foods, arts and crafts. While many thought America had no business being in Vietnam, Boudreaux’s job was to help the troops better understand the country that they were fighting in.

I grew up in an environment in which service to one’s country was a rite of passage.

When his two years of active service were up, Boudreaux was discharged on a Friday and back on the Nicholls campus by Monday.

The career-defining moments

Boudreaux went back to that little university in Thibodaux, and he never left.

It sounds like the start of a familiar Cajun joke, but this Boudreaux and Thibodaux tale is all true.

As an English professor, Boudreaux made a campus name for himself by holding a medieval-themed Chaucer Day at his home each year, reviving the Mosaic literary magazine and organizing the English Society.

“One of the reasons I went into the classroom was to help students reach that aha moment, when they realize their writing has improved or that they can enjoy reading a poem,” he says. “As a teacher, my philosophy was based on a line about the clerk in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, ‘And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.’ I firmly believe that one learns more from his students than he knows.”

For Boudreaux, the greatest reward of becoming vice president for institutional advancement was being able to continue helping students by finding support for scholarships. In his 15 years in the role, he helped increase the Nicholls Foundation’s assets from less than $1 million to more than $20 million. Recognizing the fundraising challenges faced by the Nicholls music department and women’s athletics, he helped secure private funding for 21 new Steinway pianos and created the Women’s Night Out for the Lady Colonels annual fundraiser. The university has relied on him to raise private money for the new culinary arts facility and renovations to the Mary M. Danos Theater in Talbot Hall among several other projects.

In 2012, amid a serious budget shortfall, Boudreaux faced a difficult decision: retire or lay off employees. He wasn’t ready to leave his beloved institution, but he wasn’t comfortable letting go of hardworking staff either. He decided to retire but agreed to continue working in his same position without a salary for another full year.

Boudreaux has now transitioned to a part-time role as executive director of the Nicholls Foundation, but it’s safe to say that he will never bid adieu to teaching and learning. It’s become more than his profession — it’s who he is as a person. And, of course, he’ll keep traveling, especially to Paris, the place once described by James Thurber as “a vast university of art, literature and music” and a “post-graduate course in Everything.”

As long as his health allows, Boudreaux will keep going back to France, where it all started. And you can bet he’ll order the escargot.

— Stephanie Detillier Verdin
Smothered Boneless Pork Ribs

Chef Don Kasten, assistant professor of culinary arts, helps train future chefs in the oftentimes-hectic LeBistro kitchen at the Carmel Inn. Kasten has shared the recipe for this flavorful, meat-lovers’ entree with many of his fellow chefs and assures that it’s even better when served as leftovers. When the ribs are reheated the day after cooking, the rich flavors multiply.

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon Cajun/Creole seasoning
- 4 pounds country-style boneless pork ribs
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 large white onion, chopped
- 1 small red, yellow and orange bell pepper, diced
- 1 pound small button mushrooms, diced
- 1 can mild Rotel tomatoes
- 2 cups chicken stock
- ½ cup white vermouth (can substitute a dry white wine if vermouth is not available)
- 1 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste
- 1 tablespoon Herbs de Provence (a blend of dry herbs — rosemary, thyme, lavender, etc. — found at your grocer)
- 2 bunches green onions/scallions, sliced thinly, crosswise
- 1 bunch parsley, minced

Mix the flour and Creole seasoning together in a small bowl. Dredge the boneless pork ribs in flour mixture, coating all surfaces. Reserve leftover flour. Heat olive oil over medium-high heat in large cast-iron or enameled cast-iron Dutch oven. In two batches, fry pork until golden brown, turning once. Set meat aside; reserve oil. The oil will be darkened by loose flour, so don’t delay the next step or it will scorch. Add onions to the Dutch oven, and cook until wilted; then add bell peppers, and cook until they are wilted. Add mushrooms, and cook until they release their liquid. Continue cooking until the pan is dry and onions begin to brown. Add the reserved seasoned flour, stirring constantly until the flour is a dark roux color. Add the Rotel tomatoes and vermouth to deglaze the pan, removing any stuck-on goodness and incorporating them into vegetable mixture. Cook until tomatoes and vermouth have reduced to nearly dry. Add the chicken stock, salt and Herbs de Provence, and bring to a simmer. Add the reserved pork, and cook uncovered for 1½ hours at a very gentle simmer, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking. Add the white parts of the green onions about a half hour before the pork ribs are finished simmering. Add the green parts and minced parsley just before serving ribs over rice or garlic mashed potatoes.
Macaroni and Cheese Pie

A busy father of five, Chef Richard Curtis began his culinary career as a dishwasher in a kosher restaurant and deli in Miami. Currently, Curtis divides his time between Thibodaux Regional Medical Center, where he’s the director of culinary and nutrition, and Nicholls, where he’s an adjunct instructor. He categorizes this dish as one of his personal “comfort foods with a twist!”

- 4 pounds prepared mac and cheese (use a mac and cheese frozen entree, a box mix or your favorite mac and cheese recipe)
- 6 eggs
- 18 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- 6 tablespoons butter

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a mixing bowl, melt butter, add breadcrumbs and mix well. Spread mixture evenly to coat the surface of two 9-inch pie pans. Bake crust for 10-15 minutes or until golden. Prepare mac and cheese, and cool slightly. Stir in eggs. Divide the mac and cheese mixture equally between two pie shells. Press slightly on mixture to remove air. Top with 9 ounces of cheddar cheese per pan. Bake for about 15-20 minutes or until set and browned on top. Let it rest for 15 minutes before cutting into sixths.

Spinach and Bacon Risotto

Southern born and bred, Chef Johnathan Lynch (BS ’11) has spent the past two years as sous chef at Fabio Viviani’s Café Firenze in Moorpark, Calif. He spends his extra time at a local butchery, honing his skills in the start-to-finish art of meat cutting. Although he didn’t grow up eating risotto, he now calls it the ultimate in comfort food.

- 8 ounces thin-sliced bacon
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1½ cups Arborio rice
- 1 quart chicken stock
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- ½ bag baby or regular spinach
- Parmesan cheese, grated, to taste

Pour chicken stock in a pot on medium high, and heat until warm. In a separate large skillet or pot, cook bacon on medium, until crispy. Remove bacon, break into small pieces and set aside. Remove some of the excess bacon fat, and in the same skillet or pot, saute onions for a minute or so. Add garlic, and saute until slightly softened, about 5 minutes. Pour in rice, and stir until it is all coated and slightly toasted. Add one cup of warm stock at a time, and continue cooking and stirring until just about all the liquid is absorbed. Repeat this process until rice is al dente, firm but not hard. You may or may not use all of the liquid. Season with salt and pepper; remove from heat. Stir in butter, spinach, bacon and Parmesan cheese. The heat from the risotto will cook the spinach. You’ll know your risotto is ready by how creamy it looks and tastes. Top with grated Parmesan cheese.

Fresh Apple Cobbler with Sweet Potato Crumble

After creating dazzling food for the Ritz-Carlton Resort in the Virgin Islands and the Westchester Country Club in New York, Nick Landry (BS ’05) was drawn back to his Southern roots and has spent the past five years as corporate chef in research and development with Bruce Foods Corp. in New Iberia. Landry’s version of apple cobbler just begs for a side of ice cream.

- 2 cups green apples, peeled and sliced medium to thick
- 2 cups Golden Delicious apples, peeled and sliced medium to thick
- 2 cups Gala apples, peeled and sliced medium to thick
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 9½ tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon Grand Marnier or dark rum
- 2 Bruce’s Sweet Potato Pancake Mix (6-ounce) packages

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium-size pot on medium-high heat, melt 1½ tablespoons of butter, and add apples. Allow apples to caramelize and brown for about 10-12 minutes. Add brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and vanilla. Bring to a boil, and reduce heat to low for 5-8 minutes, allowing sugar to lightly reduce and glaze the apples. Remove from heat, and add Grand Marnier or rum. Return to heat, and allow alcohol to cook out for 2-3 minutes. (Be careful when placing back on stove because alcohol may flame up.) Pour mixture into pie dish or square 9-by-9 baking dish that is lightly buttered or coated with nonstick spray. In a small bowl, combine sweet potato pancake mix and 8 tablespoons of softened butter. Mix until crumbly; then sprinkle over cobbler mixture. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until crumble is golden brown.
As we go about our normal routines at work and at home, we inevitably find ourselves daydreaming about that much-needed vacation. Some prefer a relaxing beach getaway, a theme-park adventure with the kids or exploring cities within our borders. But others dream of an international adventure to experience what can't be found close to home. When traveling outside of the U.S., a few key factors can determine whether you come home with glorious memories or decide never to go overseas again. After consulting a few of our Nicholls travel pros, we compiled our best recommendations.

— Debbie Papa Kliebert

**6 things you must do before leaving home**

1. **Get your passport.** Your local Clerk of Court provides passports, but remember that they can take weeks to arrive. Be sure to also check entry requirements for your destination, including visas and vaccines.

2. **Do some research.** Learn simple phrases if traveling to a non-English-speaking country, and download travel apps to your phone. Check your destination's extended forecast, and plan your wardrobe accordingly.

3. **Make reservations early.** Skip the lines, and reserve your tickets online or by phone. Museums sometimes require advance reservations; be aware of closure days, too.

4. **Buy travel insurance.** Unexpected illness or accidents can happen to anyone.

5. **Start a walking program.** For those with sedentary lifestyles, the rigors of daily touring can be brutal; 10- to 12-hour days are not uncommon. Two to three months before your trip, start breaking in your new shoes and walking regularly to build endurance.

6. **Get your finances in order.** Visit your bank to get a supply of your destination's currency so you won't be desperately searching for an ATM upon arrival. Let your bank and credit card companies know when and where you're traveling.

**How to plan a realistic, affordable itinerary**

You've decided to take the plunge and venture abroad on your own, but where should you begin? Get out a map, brainstorm a wish list of destinations and decide how many locations you can visit during your allotted travel time. Before deciding on travel dates, check weather patterns. Off-season travel can be cheaper and less crowded. Traveling midweek can also save you money on airfare.

**What you should know before booking a hotel**

One-night stays can be hectic, so choose a hotel that is centrally located, use it as your home base and then take day trips to other destinations. Large chain hotels can limit the cultural experience you traveled so far to see. The warmth and personal service of smaller establishments often can't be beat, but some have no elevators so you might find yourself dragging your suitcase up three flights of stairs. Read guidebooks and online traveler reviews before you choose. Paying in cash or staying at least three nights may qualify you for a better rate. Be sure to verify your hotel reservations before leaving home.

**Guided tours:**
- Expert commentary provided
- Luggage handled for you
- Reservations and local transportation arranged for you
- Better rates for airfare and accommodations
- Translators available
- Often able to skip long lines at major tourist sites

**Independent travel:**
- Personalized travel itinerary
- Freedom and flexibility to eat, sleep and sightsee at your own pace
- Ability to change plans and spend more or less time at certain spots

**Pros and Cons of Guided Tours:**
- Often early morning departures
- Limited time at destinations and for sightseeing on your own
- Occasional delays/increased wait times due to large groups
- Spontaneity limited

**Pros and Cons of Independent Travel:**
- Must handle your luggage yourself
- Language barriers in non-English-speaking countries
- Cheaper rates often available just to groups
- Not knowing local customs/laws could lead to embarrassing or dangerous situations

**Travel with Nicholls**

The university offers two experienced international travel programs — open to both students and community members.

**Nicholls Europe** (now in its 41st year)
2014 travel dates: June 2–17
2014 itinerary: Italy, France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Austria
For more information, visit nicholls.edu/Europe or call James Barnidge at 985-448-4460.

**Department of Art Study Abroad**
2014 travel dates: June 9–24
2014 itinerary: Rome, southern Italy and Sicily
For more information, visit nicholls.edu/art/study-abroad or call Jean Donegan at 985-448-4597.
15 things to never leave home without

1. Luggage tags with your contact information (attach to the outside of your bags with cable ties)
2. Travel documents, including passport, airline tickets, itineraries and driver’s license
3. Credit/debit cards and local currency
4. Security wallet
5. Prescription and over-the-counter medications (in original containers or packaging)
6. Camera and charger
7. Phone and charger
8. Electrical adaptor and converter (voltage in many European countries is 220v)
9. Disposable wipes or washcloths (often not available in hotel bathrooms; buy inexpensively and dispose after use)
10. Empty garbage bags for storing dirty laundry
11. Disposable poncho or jacket for weather changes
12. Heavy-duty shopping bag that folds flat and can later be used as an extra carry-on for souvenirs on the trip home
13. Guidebooks with translation section
14. Swiss army knife with a corkscrew for cutting/slicing on-the-go meals or opening wine bottles (be sure to pack in suitcase, not carry-on)
15. Nicholls shirt (take a photo wearing your Nicholls gear and send it to us at voila@nicholls.edu for posting on the Nicholls Facebook page)

If in doubt, leave it out
Whether traveling for five days or 15, limit yourself to one check-in bag. Try rolling your clothes tightly instead of folding them. Use mesh packing cubes (found on travel merchandise websites) or zippered bags to organize your belongings. Don’t bring full-size containers of hair-care or other hygiene products; purchase inexpensive travel containers and only bring as much as you’ll need. Discard travel containers before returning home.

- Mark your luggage with brightly colored tape or ribbon for easy identification.
- Insert a copy of your travel itinerary inside your luggage tag so that if your bag gets lost, it can be sent to your destination rather than your home address.
- Keep a change of clothing in your carry-on bag in case your luggage gets lost.
- For contact lens wearers, your eyes may get dry on long flights, so keep rinsing solution and a carry case with you, or consider wearing glasses during your flight. Don’t forget to pack an extra pair of lenses.
- Don’t lock your suitcase unless you’re using a TSA-approved lock.
- Always pack essential travel documents, medications and fragile items in your carry-on.
- Include copies of your passport and other documents in your checked luggage. Take a picture of each with your camera or cell phone.
- Leave expensive jewelry at home.
- Be mindful that if you plan to visit churches, appropriate attire is required. No shorts or sleeveless tops.
The one jet-lag tip you must follow Try to sleep during your overseas flight, and resist the urge to take a nap when you reach your destination.

How to eat like a local Eating where the locals gather is usually a sure bet for reasonably priced, good food. The four-star hotel where you’re staying may not be your best option for an authentic meal. Look for small restaurants with handwritten menus. Be mindful that prices are sometimes more if you choose to sit at a table as opposed to enjoying your coffee and pastry at the counter. Tips are often included in the bill, and because dining is not rushed in most European restaurants, you often won’t be presented with your bill until you ask.

Take stunning travel photos — with your phone University photojournalist Misty Leigh McElroy shares her best tips for shooting photos with your smartphone:

- Turn off your flash when shooting through glass. Otherwise, the reflection will bounce back and create a glare.
- You don’t need a flash to take a great photo. Look for existing light sources, and “paint” your subject with light using that source.
- Ask someone with you to turn on the flashlight app on his/her smartphone. Keep your phone’s flash off, and have your assistant shine his/her phone’s light on your subject.
- To make your photos interesting and memorable, include people in them.
- When shooting photos of people, make sure the background is not brighter than the subjects. This creates dark shadows on your subject. If the background is brighter, try turning the people around or placing them in the sunlight. Or if your phone’s camera has an HDR setting (under Options on iPhones), try using it to even out the exposure.
- Try shooting subject/background in complete shade.
- It’s best to shoot outdoor photos of people in the early morning or late evening light; it’s softer and produces less-harsh shadows.

Try these easy-to-use photo phone apps:

- **Dynamic Light** — $1 for iPhone users; enhances the color of your photos and creates dramatic lighting effects
- **Adobe Photoshop Express** — free for iPhone and Android users; allows you to crop and edit photos, add borders and remove red eye, among other features
- **Photo Editor by Aviary** — free for iPhone and Android users; includes numerous editing tools for adjusting color, sharpening photos, adding stickers, whitening teeth, etc.
- **Adobe Photoshop Touch** — $5-$10 for iPhone and Android users; designed for advanced photo editors with features such as filters, layers and other professional effects

Bring home sought-after souvenirs Don’t waste your money on gift shop trinkets — snow globes, spoons and key rings — that will soon be forgotten and collect dust on a shelf. Opt for more practical souvenirs such as scarves, jewelry, locally made art, leather goods, chocolates or other specialty food items.

4 simple ways to stay safe

1. Keep your hotel’s business card and a map with you in case you get lost, and always carry your passport with you for identification. As a backup, leave a copy of your itinerary with your family.

2. Store credit cards and currency in a zippered money belt or bag. Avoid over-the-shoulder bags or wallets in back pockets.

3. Never put a purse over the back of your restaurant chair.

4. Avoid traveling alone at night, and take the recommendations of your guide or trusted locals regarding areas tourists should avoid.
When do you expect to retire? If asked that question 10 years ago, you might have answered 65; but now, maybe not. Ask most people if they’ve calculated how much they need to accumulate throughout their working years to prepare for retirement, and surprisingly, many haven’t yet done the math.

Nicholls accounting graduate Raleigh Galiano Jr. (BA ’87) says retirement planning takes more money than you might think. His clients at Galiano Wealth and Management Group, which he opened in Cut Off in 2012, range from small business owners to oil and gas executives. But his basic advice is the same for everyone: Plan now; your future financial stability will be determined by what you put in place years before you need it. “There’s no rewind” is a motto Galiano preaches and lives by. Inside his spacious new office, for example, is a door that reveals a stairway leading up to a vacant second floor — his “emergency fund.” If a storm brings rising bayou waters, he’s already prepared to move up and carry on.

A certified financial planner with 18 years of experience, Galiano shares his best tips on how you, too, can start building your nest egg now. — Debbie Papa Kliebert

**In your 20s**

Maybe you’re in college, planning your wedding or plotting your career path. Now is the time to set up an emergency fund. The goal is to have three to nine months of living expenses available in the event of job loss, medical emergency or other unforeseen occurrences. Emergency cash needs to be liquid, meaning easily accessible without cost, delay or penalty. Your bank’s savings account or a short-term CD might fit the bill. Participate in your employer’s retirement plan if available, or establish a personal IRA with a financial adviser. What might seem like sacrifices in your 20s and 30s will materialize into the reward of a comfortable retirement.

**In your 30s**

You’ve decided to buy a home; you’re supporting your family and starting your children’s college funds. Continue to add to your emergency fund. Put the maximum contribution in your employer’s retirement plan or your personal IRA. Don’t be tempted by early withdrawals, which can have significant tax implications and penalties. Diversify your portfolio.

**In your 40s & 50s**

You have children’s education expenses, maybe a wedding to pay for, car and home mortgages, and looming retirement concerns. Save additional money outside of retirement plans. Have you thought about what you want to do when your workdays are over? Consolidate any former employers’ retirement plans into your present plan or IRA, and consult a financial adviser to re-evaluate your short- and long-term financial positions.

**In your 60s**

Your children are grown, married and maybe you’re spending time with grandchildren, but a critical question to consider is, “Will I outlive my money?” Health care costs, death of a spouse or divorce, losing your job or being unable to work due to poor health or illness can quickly deplete your savings. Consider rolling over your 401K retirement plan to one with greater control and flexibility. Look for portfolio assets that can produce more income, and continue adding to your emergency funds and contributing the maximum allowed to retirement plans and IRAs. Stay in shape and in good health to remain competitive in the job market — you may find yourself in need of a part-time job to supplement your Social Security or other retirement benefits.

**Have I saved enough to retire?**

The answer depends on your lifestyle and your debts. If your home is paid off and you are relatively debt-free, your monthly needs are far different from someone who retires with a mortgage or with substantial credit card debt. Educating yourself and consulting a financial adviser while you still have years of productive work ahead of you are crucial to being adequately prepared to enjoy the years that follow your last day of work.

— Raleigh Galiano Jr.

Galiano Wealth and Management Group
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By joining, you will:

• Help support student scholarships.
• Receive exclusive discounts at area businesses.
• Make connections through alumni tailgating, crawfish boils and more.
• Be eligible to work out at the Nicholls Recreation Center.
• Get invited to alumni-exclusive events.
• Receive alumni publications.
• Show your Colonel pride and commitment to Nicholls.

STAY CONNECTED

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Before scrubbing in to medical school, hundreds of doctors in a number of specialties launched their careers at Nicholls. Some never would have attended college, let alone medical school, had Nicholls not existed. Others had multiple college offers but chose Nicholls because of its highly regarded pre-medicine program. Though small, the Thibodaux program has garnered an excellent reputation in the medical community for not only launching students into medical school but also preparing them to succeed once they get there.

Ask Nicholls-bred doctors about their undergraduate experience, and they mostly say the same thing— biology professors, such as Dr. Burt Wilson and Dr. Marilyn Kilgen, were demanding but encouraging, accessible and caring. Coursework in the pre-med classes, especially histology and virology, made their first year of medical school much easier for them than for classmates from other universities. Dr. Ernest Hansen III (BS ’87) goes as far as comparing the Nicholls pre-med experience to the NASA space shuttle launch. “There was this sense that even if someone had a menial role, they also helped launch that shuttle. At Nicholls, every professor took great pride in preparing students for where they wanted to go—to medical school and ultimately into the medical profession.”

We caught up with eight doctors in different specialties who earned their biology/pre-med degrees in various Nicholls decades. Here are the stories of their most inspiring yet challenging cases.
Taking an Emergency Case Outside of My Field

While I was a medical intern and resident, I moonlighted in emergency rooms and various hospital departments and made house calls to earn extra money to support my wife and three kids. One winter night, I was working in the emergency room at a charity hospital in Lake Charles. I was the only doctor there, even though I was the chief resident in OB-GYN, not emergency.

They brought in a guy on a stretcher. The two people with him — his wife and child — were dead on arrival. He was still alive but unconscious with a maraschino-cherry red complexion — common signs of carbon monoxide poisoning. By myself in the middle of the night, I started racking my brain on what I could do to save this person. This was before there were hyperbaric (pressurized) oxygen chambers, which today can easily replace the carbon monoxide in your blood with oxygen.

I was familiar with an OB-GYN procedure called exchange transfusion, which we used for babies born with Rh incompatibility (when the mother is A- while the baby is A+). To save the baby’s life, we drew out some of the baby’s blood and replaced it with fresh blood and continued that cycle until the baby stabilized. I decided I was going to try applying that procedure to this adult man. I had never heard of it done before for carbon monoxide poisoning, but the man was going to die if I didn’t try something. So I drew off a pint of his blood and gave him a pint of blood and continued doing that. Finally, his color started returning to normal, and he recovered. It was a radical procedure, but it saved a guy’s life.

Since then, I’ve personally delivered more than 7,000 babies, but this remains my proudest case.

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“Without Nicholls, I would not have had the means to even go to college. From my Holy Savior High School class in Lockport, six of us went to Nicholls and became a physician, dentist, pharmacist, school principal, school superintendent and an astrophysicist. None of us could have afforded to go elsewhere.”

Dr. Joel Comeaux (DIP ’56)
Obstetrics and Gynecology | Houma OB-GYN Clinic
48 years in practice

Relaying Tragic News to a Baby’s Parents

Early in my postgraduate training, I had a patient who was born with a congenital diaphragmatic hernia — a hole in the diaphragm that allows the abdominal organs to move into the chest. The condition causes one lung to be undeveloped, the other lung to be underdeveloped and all sorts of pulmonary and cardiovascular problems. This usually fatal illness required us to put the newborn on a ventilator and on ECMO, an artificial heart and lung machine, for about 10 days. It was a battle just to keep her alive, but she finally stabilized, we were able to get her off the machines, and it appeared that she was doing well.

Days later, we did a diagnostic procedure, and the baby had a complication that she did not survive. I learned a lot that day, but the thing that sticks with me the most is the reaction of this 6-week-old baby’s parents when I told them that we had lost her. It’s never nice to deliver that kind of news, but despite their own grief, they were actually very supportive of me. I will never forget their compassion and understanding, despite the terrible blow they had received.

Even though the complication was totally unforeseen, it’s human nature that I started to think that maybe I should have done more to investigate, or maybe if I had thought the procedure through a couple of steps more, I would have approached it differently. If you don’t have the capacity to question and second-guess yourself, you probably shouldn’t be in this field.

That was 27 years ago, and that case and the events around it have shaped the way I practice medicine and how I now manage departments as an associate medical director. Most anesthesiologists want nothing to do with a sick baby, but that’s our specialty. Babies and little kids in general are resilient and bounce back quickly, but they can go into a tailspin just as fast. Safety and quality always come first. There’s a snake under every bush. You can never, ever, ever get complacent. I try to live and teach these messages every day.

“Recently, I had the opportunity to help care for the grandkid of one of my Nicholls professors. To see my career come full circle was very gratifying.”

Dr. John Heaton (BS ’81)
Anesthesiology, Patient Safety and Quality | Children’s Hospital, New Orleans
22 years in practice

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Removing a patient’s entire stomach

During my first year in practice, a patient was admitted to Thibodaux Regional Medical Center after several days of nausea, vomiting and pain. We ran a series of tests and determined that he had a gastric volvulus, which is usually a catastrophic condition. His stomach was essentially twisted, causing it to lose its blood supply. Without blood, the stomach starts to die. It was the first time I had personally seen this type of case, but I had a clear understanding of how to manage it.

I performed emergency surgery to remove his entire stomach. I repaired what damage I could before putting it back in his abdomen. His esophagus could no longer function properly, so I attached it to his skin on his chest wall. For weeks, the patient had no connection between his mouth and his intestines. He was fed through a tube, and a bag collected any spit he swallowed. He spent a long time in the Intensive Care Unit and probably four to six weeks in the hospital.

After more than a year of care, he was finally ready to have his final operation, where part of his colon was used to replace his esophagus and reconnect his mouth to his intestines. Today, this patient has esophageal function and is still walking around Thibodaux.

That’s what’s really gratifying about surgery and why I love coming to work every morning. In surgery, you’re able to make a disease go away, to remove a condition and produce a cure. This case was very rare, but even if it’s just a patient with gallbladder disease who is hurting, it’s so gratifying to be able to remove the problem and know they’re feeling better.

Because I grew up in north Thibodaux, many of the patients I take care of know my parents, know my friends or know me. When I was 12 years old, I was a paperboy for the Daily Comet, and I’ve had the pleasure of taking care of several of my old paper-route customers. It’s been fantastic for me, but I think it also brings a certain degree of comfort for the patients. They know who I am; they watched me grow up.

“The Nicholls pre-med program’s smaller classes and one-on-one instruction are fairly unique. Medical school was a little more difficult for my friends who had gone to larger universities. They didn’t have the extensive biology background that I did.”
The saying in emergency medicine ought to be: Go into it for the stories, and stay for the medicine. You can't get these kinds of crazy stories anywhere else.

When I first started working as an emergency room doctor, it was about 3 a.m., and I was in the back doing some reading when the nurses called me. They said, "Dr. Hansen, we have a lady out here who has burning on urination. She says she's on her period." I said, "OK, let's go ahead and put in a urinary catheter." Shortly after, they called me back and said, "When we went to insert the catheter, we found a head." So it's 3 in the morning, this woman is having a baby — she said she didn't know she was pregnant — and there's no obstetrician, so I had to deliver the baby.

That's one of the biggest challenges of emergency medicine. It's so broad, and sometimes you're flying by the seat of your pants. I never know what I'm going to do on any given day. I had a guy come in one night with a bad toothache and ask for a nerve block. I said, "I'm not trained to work on teeth." He said, "You have some books in the back, huh? Go look it up. I'll be here when you get back." So that's how I learned to do dental blocks.

When I first came to Ochsner Medical Center in Slidell, it was really quiet. The volume was about 30 percent less than where I had come from, so it was a nice, slow pace. Then one day, they bring in a teenager — a gang member who was probably about 16 — who went into a truck stop to wash his hands, and somebody shot him in the neck. He ended up doing fine, but it was quite different from what I was used to seeing. The craziest shift I ever had was at Thibodaux Regional Medical Center, where I dealt with two broken necks and a gunshot wound all in one night.

Through it all, my philosophy is if I stay calm, my patients will be calm. Emergency medicine is a tough job that few people can do, so it's gratifying to know that I can do it and help people in the process.

“My freshman calculus professor told the class to go to his house if anyone needed help. Sure enough, a group of us rang his doorbell, and he invited us in to review the material. I could be wrong, but I don’t think that’s happening at many universities. The individualized attention at Nicholls gave me the best chance of getting into med school.”

Dr. Ernest Hansen III (BS ’87)
Emergency Medicine | Ochsner Medical Center, Slidell
20 years in practice
TREATING A MAN WITH LEPROSY

When people think of Hansen’s disease, also known as leprosy, they usually think of the Bible story of Jesus healing the lepers. It still has a pretty significant stigma attached to it. Many people don’t realize that the nine-banded armadillo — common in the south-central United States — carries the bacteria that causes leprosy.

During my first year of residency at the University of Texas at Galveston, I had a patient who had recently noticed red bumps all over his body. The gentleman, who had just retired from a career in the petrochemical industry, had never seen a dermatologist before, but the suddenly appearing lesions caused him great distress. I performed a skin biopsy and was able to determine that he had leprosy.

The patient remembers going fishing back in the ’60s with a friend who cooked some meat and asked him to try it. The patient ate the meat, only later learning that it was armadillo. One theory is that he may have contracted leprosy through consuming that meat. It’s caused by a slow-growing bacteria, so it’s very common for Hansen’s disease to stay dormant in the body for a long time — even four decades.

Due to the chronic nature of the disease, I was able to follow the patient for close to a year, and with antibiotics, he was completely cured. As a dermatologist-in-training, it was amazing for me to have the ability to see this uncommon disease clinically, monitor the patient’s treatment and learn about the many aspects of Hansen’s.

Generally, though, what I see the most of in clinic is premature skin aging and the development of precancerous and cancerous skin conditions. Since the early days of my training, I’ve seen a dramatic number of skin cancers — it’s become an epidemic in the South. The importance of sunscreen and sun avoidance can’t be overstressed, especially to young people. Most of our sun exposure occurs before we’re 18 years old, and once the skin has sustained damage from UV rays, the damage stays with us.

“From day one, I thought Nicholls prepared me very well for medical school. In fact, my first semester of med school was an easier transition than most students experience thanks to Nicholls.”

Dr. Ryan Matherne (BS ’02)
Dermatology, Dermatopathology | Matherne Dermatology, Lutcher, Cut Off and Metairie
2 years in practice
Waiting for a heart to heal itself

I had just started working at CIS in Houma when I received an emergency call in the middle of the night. A man in his mid-50s with seemingly no prior cardiovascular problems had arrived at Terrebonne General Medical Center with symptoms of a heart attack.

When I arrived at the hospital, I diagnosed him with an acute myocardial infarction. This was only my second acute heart attack patient as an attending physician. When you're in training as a resident and waiting for a heart to heal itself.

“It's an unbelievable jump from college to medical school, but the Nicholls pre-med program gave me a head start. The curriculum included a great amount of pre-professional classes that were similar to those I took my first year of med school.”

fellow, someone more experienced is always watching over you, so it takes a while to realize that you can operate on your own. But my eight years of training quickly kicked in as I placed a stent in his coronary artery and watched his vital signs improve.

The next day, the patient took an unexpected turn for the worse. The stent was working perfectly, but the patient's health continued to decline. His kidneys began to shut down, and dialysis was needed. We placed a special balloon pump in his heart as well as a pacemaker in his chest to help his heart beat regularly. Sedated and on a ventilator, the patient was returned to the Intensive Care Unit.

The hardest part was telling his family that the man who had seemed completely healthy a couple of days ago now had a high chance of dying. It was difficult for them to understand that the best course of action at this time was to step back and let the body repair itself. Despite all of today's advanced medical technology, sometimes the best medicine is just to watch and wait, but that's not easy.

A week later, the patient was starting to improve and wake up. His heart and kidney functions were all improving. A very exciting moment for me was telling the family that the patient did not need any special equipment to sustain a pulse or breathing. Using the ventilator and balloon pump allowed his heart the time it needed to recover and repair itself.

Today, the patient is back at work and living a normal life. He and his wife hug me every time they come to the clinic. That's why I chose the field of medicine and the specialty of cardiology. I am able to take care of critically ill patients in a hospital setting, perform procedures and follow patients in clinic. I get the immediate gratification of helping patients during some of their most dire times, as well as the long-term gratification of caring for these patients for the rest of their lives.

PERFORMING RISKY

T

echnology has dramatically changed how we practice medicine. When I was in medical school and residency, CAT scans were just being developed, and ultrasound was primitive. Today, we commonly treat kidney stones with Shock Wave Lithotripsy, a non-surgical technique for breaking the stone into fragments, but before lithotripsy was available, kidney stones often required open surgery.

I remember way back when, I had a patient with a stone blocking the flow of urine from his right kidney to the bladder. The patient had undergone multiple previous surgeries, leaving his whole pelvis full of fibrotic tissue. I really couldn't tell arteries from veins from nerves, and there are a lot of vital structures in the pelvic area. I remember it took 4 1/2 to five hours to finally get the stone because the ureter was so tortuous; in other words, the kidney tube didn't follow the
Caring for a child with a rare genetic disorder

I knew one thing when I started medical school — I would never go into pediatrics. When I did my pediatrics rotation, though, I fell in love with it. I enjoyed the patients and the parents, and I guess it was meant to be.

I've kept a picture of one of my patients — Isabel — on my desk for a long time. I started seeing her as a newborn. We weren't sure what was wrong with Isabel at first. She would slough her skin and hair very rapidly. She couldn't sweat. She grew teeth very quickly and then lost them by 6 months old.

I started doing some research and sent her files to a geneticist who diagnosed her with a rare form of ectodermal dysplasia, a genetic condition with only six previously reported cases in the world. All of the tissues in her body were aging rapidly, which led to infection. There's no cure. All I could do was try to prevent her from getting infections and to intervene quickly when she did. Because she couldn't sweat, temperature control was critical, too, and I monitored it regularly and tried to maintain a steady balance in her body.

Isabel was a fighting little girl. She enjoyed going to Disney World and spending time at her family's camp in Mississippi. She loved life and so did her family. Kids tend to handle illness — even fatal illness — better than their parents do. They're more worried about their parents than they are about themselves.

We lost Isabel one year ago at the age of 5. You try your best to help, but there are those kids who you just can't save. I believe that God put these kids on earth for a reason, and that's to teach us how precious life is. Isabel was one of those kids. She was a blessing.

“I grew up in a farming family, and my parents insisted that we went to college. If we could stay local and save money, then we did. When I got to medical school, I realized that Nicholls had given me a very strong base. The pre-med classwork really helped me get through the first couple of years in med school.”

Dr. Sheila Pitre (BS ’87)
Pediatrics | The Children’s Clinic of Thibodaux
20 years in practice

KIDNEY STONE SURGERY

I told the company rep about one of my cases, and he said let’s see if it works. It did, but it wasn’t without anxiety.

I love practicing urology, but what I really love is treating patients. There’s a lot more to patient care than treating their illness. I try to spend time discussing the issues surrounding the problem — whether it’s anxiety, depression or family conflict. If you just walk in and say you need an operation and then walk out, you miss a lot.

“I originally went to Nicholls to study math, then changed my major to pre-med after working part time at Thibodaux Regional. The biology foundation I got from Nicholls made medical school a lot easier. I didn’t have to go back and learn things; I had already been taught the basics.”
With Jacques Cousteau as their inspiration, Nicholls biology graduate students embark on a yearly trip to learn more about the Louisiana coast and one another.

Photos by Misty Leigh McElroy
Pennsylvania native Nicole Lundberg had lived in Louisiana for less than a month when she headed down to Cocodrie for something the Nicholls biology department dubs “Calypseaux.” Before she knew it, Lundberg was in muddy water up to her thighs, as she sowed new plants along Louisiana’s barrier islands. Later that evening, she found herself up to her elbows in boiled crabs, as she sampled genuine Cajun cuisine for the first time.

Lundberg quickly discovered what Calypseaux was — a total immersion into the Gulf Coast environment, into Louisiana culture and into the Nicholls marine and environmental biology department.
master’s program. Many graduate programs host a retreat or orientation, but Nicholls faculty insist that Calypseaux is neither. Instead, it’s an expedition — inspired by famed explorer Jacques Cousteau and his research boat *Calypso*.

Each September, a new batch of Nicholls biology graduate students experiences Calypseaux, a uniquely Louisiana bonding experience. They arrive in Cocodrie on Friday without knowing much about one another, without really understanding where the graduate program will take them, without having much — or any — exposure to Louisiana’s coast. By Sunday, they return to Thibodaux with deep friendships and island nicknames, with firsthand knowledge of the state’s coastal erosion problem and
with a fiery passion to discover something new through their graduate research.

“Marine biology is an old tradition, and one of the perks of this field is being a part of that legacy,” says Dr. Gary LaFleur, associate professor and expedition leader. “The Louisiana coast is always changing, so there are still things to discover, still things to see that have never been seen.”

Above, at each island, LaFleur sets up flags representing Acadiana, the U.S. and Nicholls. “Planting a flag is something the old conquistadors did when making landfall,” he explains. “It adds a sense of importance to our expedition.”

Bottom left, associate professor Allyse Ferrara unwraps bundles of *Spartina* and prepares them for planting. Bottom right, LaFleur and Aimee Hafkesbring, undergraduate student from Destrehan, plant mangroves along the coast. The woody, strong-rooted black mangroves are relatively storm-resistant.
Above, after a long day’s work, Clayton Kern, graduate student from York, Pa., enjoys the breezy boat ride back to shore.

Below, biology students present Cecil Lapeyrouse and his wife, Etta, with the Tou lou lou Salût Award for supporting Louisiana’s coast and culture. Lapeyrouse owns and operates Cecil Lapeyrouse Grocery, a mainstay in Chauvin since 1914.
Above, biology graduate students, faculty and other Calypseaux participants bond over boiled seafood and beverages at Cecil Lapeyrouse Grocery.

Left, Cecil Lapeyrouse Grocery employee Mike Soudelier teaches Nicole Lundberg, graduate student from Lilly, Pa., how to peel boiled crabs with help from Seth Moncrief, graduate student from Morgan City.
Mark Olivier oversees the production of larger-than-life props at Blaine Kern Studios, including the 17.5-foot-tall King Kong for the Krewe of Bacchus.
In a large warehouse along the Mississippi River, rows of massive papier-mâché heads fill a tucked-away corner. Papa Smurf and Uncle Sam sit across from the Wizard of Oz and the Creature from the Black Lagoon. Willie Nelson’s head peaks out of a crowded nook. Not too far away is Tow Mater from Cars and a pair of life-size Rock ‘Em Sock ‘Em Robots. Football players and combat soldiers share the space with nursery rhyme characters, historical figures, politicians and pop culture icons.
Top row, Blaine Kern Studios artists sculpt new props out of large sheets of Styrofoam. Oftentimes, existing props, such as the Willie Nelson head, are repurposed to fit a float’s theme.

Middle row, detailed airbrushing and hand painting of props set Blaine Kern Studios apart from its competitors. As Mardi Gras season ends, artists begin patching up and repainting props for the next year.

Bottom row, in addition to sculptors, painters and papier-mâché experts, Olivier’s team also includes artists who craft thousands of detailed flowers by hand.

See more photos of Blaine Kern Studios at nicholls.edu/voila/mardigras
This is where Mark Olivier (BA '02) comes for inspiration. As the prop shop manager at Blaine Kern Studios, Olivier oversees the team of artists who bring Mardi Gras to life. His crew of 20 sculptors, painters, flower-makers and papier-mâché experts create nearly every sculptural piece that decorates the more than 500 floats for 21 Carnival krewes.

Directing the “largest kinetic art show in the world” each year is an intensely creative, demanding, high-profile job — one that Olivier, a former oilfield worker from Houma, never could have envisioned for himself. But as he works in the midst of Carnival’s pomp and circumstance, the Nicholls art graduate never loses sight of just how important his unique career is.

“Our work represents Louisiana for what it is — a place that prides itself on hospitality,” Olivier says. “When I see the crowds of people lining up along parade routes, I know the impact of what I do — ultimately, I’m an ambassador for Louisiana.”

You ought to go see the Mardi Gras Carnival season never ends at Blaine Kern Studios. As the sun sets on Fat Tuesday, the staff is already gearing up for next year’s parades.

Once krewes decide on their parade theme, make requests for special float elements and approve the art director’s sketches, Olivier takes over the project and directs its completion from start to finish. His office walls are plastered with hundreds of float sketches. For each one, he breaks down what’s needed — flowers, sculptural pieces, painting, float construction.

Walking through the warehouse’s eclectic inventory of nearly 10,000 props, Olivier assesses whether his staff will need to build a new sculpture or refurbish an existing one. New props are typically carved out of oversized Styrofoam sheets, covered in papier-mâché, painted and sealed. More often than not, old props are transformed into something fresh. With a little carving, painting and creativity, Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* becomes Linda Blair from *The Exorcist*. Pee-wee Herman morphs into the Tin Man. King Henry XIII shifts into Disney’s Beast.

“You definitely have to have an imagination to do what we do,” says Olivier, a multitasking master who keeps a mental file of all props on hand.

Since 1947, Blaine Kern Studios has been the leading parade float builder, serving the major New Orleans krewes as well as many out-of-state parades. And Mardi Gras is only part of the business. Olivier’s prop shop also creates sculptures for theme parks, casinos and marketing campaigns for major companies such as Chick-Fil-A, M&M Mars, Coca-Cola, Walt Disney and Universal Studios.

Even when it’s not Carnival season, their work is always under the microscope. The large warehouse of Blaine Kern Studios doubles as Mardi Gras World, a one-of-a-kind tourist attraction where visitors can walk through the artists’ workshop and watch Olivier and his team on the job. It was on such a visit to Mardi Gras World that Olivier himself became interested in the industry.
“I said, ‘YOU KNOW WHAT? I WANT TO BE AN ARTIST.’ WHETHER IT WAS RIGHT OR WRONG, I WAS DOING SOMETHING FOR MYSELF.”
DO WATCHA WANNA

Inspired by his father, Dennis, who ran Terrebonne Hardware for 40 years, and his mother, Paula, who operated a ceramics studio out of their home, Olivier initially set out to run his own business. After graduating from South Terrebonne High School in 1988, he took his entrepreneurial spirit to Southeastern Louisiana University and majored in economics.

Two years into his studies, Olivier found himself worn too thin. Working two jobs while juggling schoolwork proved impossible.

He left Southeastern; married his high school sweetheart, Angela Dupre (BSN ’94); and landed a job with Bowen Oil Tools. His career move made it possible for Angela to earn her nursing degree from Nicholls and for Olivier to occasionally take college night classes.

Laid off after nine years in the oilfield, Olivier was forced to rethink his future once again. Angela suggested that he return to school.

“I said, ‘You know what? I want to be an artist.’ Whether it was right or wrong, I was doing something for myself,” says Olivier, who had long enjoyed drawing. “It didn’t matter if I did something with my degree or not; it was what I wanted to do.”

In the Nicholls art department, Olivier found encouraging faculty members who pushed him to try new art mediums and techniques. He experimented with bronze work in the campus foundry, which had just been developed, and volunteered to help assistant art professor Deborah Lillie with her blacksmithing work at the E.D. White Plantation. He assisted in cleaning up the university’s newly acquired Chauvin Sculpture Garden and almost changed his major to art history after becoming energized by art professor Deborah Cibelli’s lectures.

“Occasionally, for some of the props we create here, I’ll go back and find out the history behind it,” says Olivier, who still references his textbook from Cibelli’s class. “Mardi Gras floats often tell a tale, and we want to make sure we’re being pretty accurate.”

Olivier finished his degree with an emphasis in sculpture but wasn’t convinced he’d find a job in his field.

“I just figured I’d do art for myself or maybe teach,” recalls Olivier, who eventually landed a job as the director of the South Louisiana Center for the Arts in Houma.

On a random weekend trip with Angela to the Riverwalk, Olivier spotted a big sign advertising Mardi Gras World.

“What’s Mardi Gras World?” he asked his wife.

As the curious couple took the colorful tour through the Carnival workshop, Olivier was awestruck, wondering if he, too, could work there. He asked the gift shop cashier about employment, but she cautioned that few spots were available. Olivier applied anyway.

THEY ALL ASKED FOR YOU

A year later — long after forgetting about his application — Olivier came home to a message on his answering machine from Barry Kern, president and CEO of Blaine Kern Studios. Kern was interested in hiring Olivier to work in the fiberglass fabrication department. Three days into the job, however, Olivier was completely caught off guard when he was asked to run the entire prop shop.

“I was extremely nervous,” he recalls. “Mardi Gras was right around the corner, and there was still a lot of work to be done. I was trying to learn what to
It's Carnival Time

It's the Friday before Mardi Gras 2013, and the usually neatly shaven Olivier is in full-beard mode. Since November, he and his team have been working overtime preparing for this week. Shaving and other nonessential activities have been

Olivier coordinates logistics for a test run of the Krewe of Endymion's "Pontchartrain Beach: Then and Now" megafloat. The day before the parade rolls, he helps ensure that the 365-foot-long float — the world's largest — will be able to turn safely into the Superdome.
put on hold to squeeze in every detail that must be perfected before parades roll. After all, Blaine Kern Studios only survives by meeting its deadlines, Olivier points out. Asking for even a one-day extension is not an option.

As Olivier helps secure harnesses on the Krewe of Zulu’s floats, he receives a call that his help is needed down at the Superdome. For the first time since its completion, the nine-unit “Pontchartrain Beach: Then and Now” megafloat is being taken for a test drive. Before more than 250 riders from the Krewe of Endymion board the world’s largest float on Saturday, Kern’s staff must ensure that the 365-foot-long behemoth can snake through the parade route and into the Superdome.

Now in his 10th Mardi Gras season, Olivier is one of the few people who know how to instruct tractor drivers to turn into the Dome — without damaging or derailing the float.

“Here’s the moment of truth,” artist Jessica Callac says as the float turns onto Dave Dixon Drive. “If something happens to it, it’s going to be a long night for us.”

Juggling conversations on his CB radio, walkie-talkie and cellphone, Olivier calmly but firmly relays instructions back to his artists in the warehouse while receiving reports from logistics staff monitoring the float’s progress. As the units begin entering the Superdome opening, Olivier stretches out his arms, measuring how much wiggle room is left between the float and the Dome’s wall. The float gets a little close on the right side, but slowly all nine state-of-the-art units safely glide onto the Superdome floor.

Olivier is relieved but not yet relaxed. Blaine Kern Studios remains a fairly small mom-and-pop operation, requiring everyone to wear many hats during Mardi Gras. Olivier and his artists aren’t tethered to their workstations; they help along the parade routes — making sure the floats get to their starting point and make it to the finish line safely.

One year, the “Old Man River” float in Endymion passed too close to a curb, ripping off a large chunk of its prop. The resourceful Olivier had 20 minutes to piece the sculpture back together with paint and whatever materials he could find in the street, mainly cardboard boxes.

“A lot can go wrong during a four-hour parade, and we have to do our best to fix the problems under pressure, do it safely and keep things moving along,” he says. “On the street, everybody’s safety depends on what our company does, so the stress level is high.”

By the time Ash Wednesday rolls around, Olivier finally begins to relax. Well, sort of.

“Ash Wednesday for me is heaven,” he says. “At the end of the day, I’m happy to go to Mass, get my ashes and reflect upon all the activity of the past few months. I can take a deep breath, knowing that we basically have a year to prepare for the next Mardi Gras season.”

And what will the next Mardi Gras season be like? Well, that’s the fun part of the job. No year is ever the same.

“What will be the next big thing? I’m not sure,” Olivier says. “Whatever you can dream up and be willing to pay for.”
DoBee Plaisance has had unprecedented success as the Nicholls women’s basketball coach, but she’s not done yet.

It wasn’t supposed to happen this way. Nicholls women’s basketball had just wrapped up its best season in team history, securing a coveted spot in the 2013 Southland Conference tournament.

At the previous year’s tournament, the Colonels had done the unthinkable — winning their first postseason game while knocking off top-seeded Central Arkansas. The 20-point upset announced to the conference that the historically downtrodden Nicholls program was now one to be contended with.

All season long, Coach DoBee Plaisance and her players had worked to ensure that 2013 would be their year. And it seemed like it might be. Back on the Merrell Center court in Katy, Texas, the Colonels were as close as they had ever come to a championship title. But in the tournament’s second round, that dream unraveled as they fell 86-70 to McNeese State University, a team they had beaten twice during the season.

The loss stung, no doubt. But one defeat wasn’t enough to weaken Plaisance’s resolve to win a conference championship. When it comes to winning, she doesn’t mince words. “I think I’m going to win a championship every year,” she says, “and that’s never going to change.”

Standing out, on and off the court
Mere mention of a Nicholls women’s basketball championship would have been considered foolish when Plaisance arrived at Nicholls in 2008. The team went 2-25 that season, but Plaisance didn’t lose hope.

Slowly, she turned the tide after that two-win season, doubling team wins to four in 2010 and eight in 2011, then 15 in 2012 and 19 in 2013. Methodically, season by season, she’s built up not only the program but also the integrity of her players.

Ask her how she did it, and Plaisance attributes everything to faith, family and education — a trinity of values that her parents, Ray and Judy Ronquillo, instilled in her from an early age.

The oldest of four girls and one boy, Plaisance grew up in a large, tight-knit New Orleans family. Even back then, she was a social ringleader with a supersized personality. As a slightly mischievous teen, she once caused a gas leak that closed a wing of her high school. With her biology teacher away from the classroom, Plaisance unknowingly kicked a gas knob while dancing on top of a lab table and showing off her Elvis impersonation to “Blue Suede Shoes.”

“I’ve been told I’ve never met a stranger, and that’s because I love people,” says Plaisance, who describes herself as being the “good kind of bad kid.”

As the first of three Ronquillo children to play Division I athletics, Plaisance made a name for herself by adopting an aggressive, scrappy playing style. At Southeastern Louisiana University, where she played for two years, Plaisance was ejected from a game after unintentionally knocking an opposing player out cold with her elbow. Known on campus as the “Hammond Hammer,” the 6-foot-2-inch Plaisance planned to continue her playing career in Germany until her father insisted she complete her degree.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in health science and attending graduate school, Plaisance switched gears and embarked on a coaching career.

Having a little faith
More than 25 years later, coaching underdog teams into championship winners has become the story of Plaisance’s career.

The women’s basketball program at St. Martin’s Episcopal School in Metairie was largely disregarded when Plaisance took over as head coach in 1986. Handed a team with only “three preppy girls who didn’t like to sweat,” Plaisance still believed she could win state championships there. In her eight years, she led the team to seven state playoffs and two state titles.

“I didn’t plan to leave St. Martin’s,” she says. “In my mind, I was going to continue to win state championships and then retire. That was my plan. I always tell people, if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plan.”
In 1995, Loyola University approached Plaisance with an offer to be the first head coach of its newly established women’s basketball program. The opportunity was too big for Plaisance to turn down.

With no assistant coaches, no scholarships to offer and few resources, Plaisance — now a mother of two — juggled the roles of head coach, recruiter, athletic trainer and operations manager. She taped ankles, set up bleachers before games, mopped floors and washed uniforms. After multiple seasons with only single-digit wins, Plaisance turned to her Christian faith for guidance and led an inspired season-opening practice.

“I told those kids: ‘You have two choices in life. You can look at what you have or what you don’t have. You have a staff that cares, but if you look at what we don’t have, we’re screwed. I’m tired of losing; it’s time we win here.’”

The Loyola Wolfpack went 21-11 that season, beating three Division I schools. “All I wanted to do was get a banner up at Loyola,” she remembers. “Well, by the time I left, there were two conference and two tournament championship banners hanging.”

After leading her team to the NAIA Elite Eight in 2008, Plaisance once again found herself with an offer to leave a successful program and take over a struggling one — this time at Nicholls.

“When I learned that Nicholls women’s basketball had never had a winning season and had never won a postseason game, that’s what hooked me,” says the headstrong Plaisance. “I felt like this was a place where I could make a difference. Some of my friends in Division I said, ‘This isn’t the one, DoBee. Wait for another opportunity.’ But that just fired me up more.”

Making basketball a family affair

Plaisance calls herself a “coach mom,” and it’s a fitting description for how she interacts with her players and her own children. Whether she’s talking to her daughter, Theresa — a senior on the LSU basketball team and National Player of the Year candidate — or her son, Scott Jr. — a senior at Metairie Park Country Day School and highly recruited basketball player — or her team, Plaisance doles out the same basic advice: Do the right thing. And trust that doing the right thing will eventually pay off.

She deliberately blurs the lines between basketball and life principles. “When my players don’t run a line drill fast enough, I don’t get on them about being lazy; I get on them about settling,” Plaisance says. “I ask, ‘What are you going to do, settle in life? You can’t just do what you feel like every day. You have to get up every morning, push yourself and do what you don’t feel like.’ It’s all about accountability, faith and discipline — in life and on the court.”

Plaisance’s own children learned these lessons early, often accompanying their mom to her practices and camps. She didn’t force them to go the athletics route, but she made sure they were in that environment from a young age. Now in their ultracompetitive household, it’s Plaisance’s husband, Scott, who helps everyone keep life in perspective.

Married for 23 years, Plaisance and Scott have known each other since they were 9 years old — back when she asked him to join a neighborhood backyard kickball game. An outside salesman for DCL Mooring and Rigging, Scott is an easygoing dad and husband who splits his time among his wife’s, daughter’s and son’s athletic events.

“He’s the perfect complement to me,” Plaisance says. “He’s just a fun guy who loves to fish, loves a good joke and has fun just playing.”

Coaching with confidence

Plaisance, on the other hand, readily admits that she wants to win at everything. “I want to beat my players on the bus at spades, for Pete’s sake,” she says with her room-filling laugh.

When she recruits potential players, Plaisance sells them on the idea that they can make a difference at Nicholls and be a part of something special. Even though she has had unprecedented success with the Nicholls women’s basketball program, Plaisance wants more for herself and her players.

“I didn’t come here as a stepping stone. I came here to do something, and I haven’t done it yet,” she says. “I never said how long it was going to take me to win a championship here. It took me 13 years to reach sustained success at Loyola. But I feel like it’s time at Nicholls. This year, we have no excuses. We will have no distractions. We will all be on the same page.

“I’m not afraid to say it — we’re supposed to win this year.” — Clyde Verdin Jr.
Two consecutive one-win seasons might be enough to damper the spirits of many Colonel football fans but not Greg Greely. An eternal optimist with an infectious warmth, Greely will tell you that the Colonels have what it takes to win — he just knows it.

That kind of attitude was exactly what Nicholls football needed while mounting a comeback from its disappointing 2-20 record over the past two seasons. As far as Colonel morale boosters go, Greely is as ideal for the role as Coach Charlie Stubbs could have hoped for. With a wide smile that rarely disappears from his face, Greely uniquely identifies with student-athletes because: For one, he has walked in their shoes, having proudly worn the Colonel football jersey in the early 1980s and still holding the all-time Nicholls record for career interceptions. And two, he is a fellow student, having re-enrolled at Nicholls to finish his bachelor’s degree.

“It was always my dream to finish my degree at Nicholls,” says Greely, who rejoined the Colonel football staff in 2012 as a volunteer student assistant coach. “This place did so much for me. Nicholls helped get me where I am today and welcomed me back without hesitation.”

An all-state high school quarterback from Bogalusa, Greely walked on to the Colonel football team in 1981 and made an immediate impression. Before a record crowd of more than 14,000 fans in John L. Guidry Stadium, he snatched two interceptions, catapulting the Colonels to a 56-14 win over Southern University. During his four seasons, he racked up 21 interceptions and helped Nicholls earn its only Gulf Star Conference title.

Although he accumulated many college accolades, one void remained: a college degree. Only 37 hours shy of his degree, Greely left Nicholls in 1985, when the U.S. Football League’s San Antonio Gunslingers selected him as their 24th overall draft pick. What seemed like a career dream come true quickly began to unravel. Before the season even started, the league folded, leaving Greely without a job. Not ready to give up on his football career, Greely went to various NFL team tryouts. The Green Bay Packers signed him as a free agent but then waived him due to an injury. He returned home and signed with the New Orleans Saints as a replacement player during the 1987 NFL strike, but as players began to cross picket lines and return to the gridiron, Greely was forced out. For the next 17 years, he worked as a Blue Bell Creameries driver/salesman and Dillard’s receiving associate and operated his own grass-cutting business.

One thing Greely has never done is lament his series of unfortunate breaks that kept him from a professional football career; instead, you’ll hear the tale of a man filled with hope and enthusiasm for what he can do now. Armed with a new mission to finish his interdisciplinary studies degree in 2014 and become a Nicholls graduate assistant coach, Greely hopes to share the lessons he’s learned from both his successes and disappointments on and off the football field.

“It’s so humbling yet rewarding,” says Greely, who was inducted into the Nicholls Athletics Hall of Fame in September. “I can’t think of a better way to give back than to recruit student-athletes to Nicholls, sharing with them my journey and how it helped shape who I am today.”

— Clyde Verdin Jr.
PROTECTING HOME FIELD

While his mom awaited a heart transplant, Tyler Duplantis found relief on the Nicholls baseball diamond.

APRIL 7, 2013. NOTHING WAS GOING RIGHT. The Nicholls baseball team, already off to a disappointing 1-7 start in Southland Conference play, now trailed Texas A&M-Corpus Christi 2-1 in the bottom of the ninth.

With two outs and runners at the corners, junior first baseman Tyler Duplantis made his way to the plate. Hitless on the day, Tyler had a chance to be the game hero. With a 2-2 count, he was quickly down to his final swing of the bat. The game rested on the Thibodaux native’s shoulders.

For Tyler, though, this wasn’t pressure — it was the perfect escape. Pressure was patiently waiting for him at home. Baseball was his relief.

In March 2007, Tyler’s mother, Mary, was diagnosed with an arrhythmia and cardiomyopathy. Simply put, her heart no longer worked the way it should, and the prognosis wasn’t good. Shortly thereafter, the Duplantis family sat down and made a pact.
"We decided right then that no matter what would happen with mom, we were going to keep our day-to-day lives normal," Tyler says. "For me, there would be no carry-over from family life to baseball."

Easier said than done. The next six years would test every fiber of the Duplantis family's mental toughness and faith as Mary endured a series of medical procedures — some more effective than others — and a long-term hospital stay in Houston. Through it all, Tyler poured his fears and frustrations into baseball.

A graduate of E.D. White High School, Tyler joined the Nicholls baseball program in 2009, but he didn't stay long.

"He walked on as a freshman and didn't have a great fall," recalls then-assistant and current Nicholls head coach Seth Thibodeaux. "He wanted to play and realized there wouldn't be much opportunity here, so he headed to Loyola and had two really good years. But I think he always wanted to return to Nicholls and prove he could play here. We got him back in fall 2011, and he was on a mission. He put on muscle and was in the cages every day. It was one of the best redshirt years I've ever seen. He studied film — something I've never seen a redshirt do. That's who Tyler is, though. He gets the most out of himself every day."

The source of Tyler's drive was both simple and noble: Every night he just wanted to relay some happy news to his mother, who was patiently waiting for a heart transplant.

"For me to say that all this hasn't been hard wouldn't be right, but in those early years, I learned how to flip the switch," Tyler says. "There was nothing I could do to help my mom's health, but I could do my best in everything else. How could I give anything less while she was fighting so hard? So, I knew that for me to do well and have a good story to tell her at the end of the day would make her happy. That was my way of providing for her."

Staying true to his family's wishes, Tyler kept his mother's personal struggles to himself while quietly taking on additional home responsibilities. His dad, David, drove back and forth from Thibodaux to Houston, where Mary waited on a new heart with their youngest child, Jacob, now 12. Rather than move into an apartment with his teammates, Tyler stayed at home to help look out for his younger brother, Ryan, now 18, and help his sister, Kaley, now 20.

"That young man has never been a complainer," Thibodeaux says. "He helped raise his siblings, he's carrying a 3.2 GPA in marketing and he's been successful on the field. You never would have known that something was wrong. We, as a team, handled it well because of how he handled it."

Tyler fed off of his teammates' energy. "I don't think they realized how much I relied on them," he says. "They're just a positive group of guys to be around. The field was my getaway. For three to five hours out of the day, there was nothing that could go wrong."

Tyler worked his way into the starting lineup during the 2012–13 season and was off to a solid start when he got a long-awaited call in late February.

"The hospital called my mom and said there's a small chance she might get a heart transplant. Right before practice, I was told to pack my stuff because they were pretty sure this was happening. My team and I gathered for a quick prayer, and I was gone. It was pure excitement but with a little anxiety. It's never a given that it's going to work. She had some early signs of rejection, but everything's been good so far."

Mary's new heart started beating March 1. The very next day, Tyler was back with his team on the field, picking up right where he left off. In his best season yet, he led the Colonels in batting average, on-base percentage and fielding percentage. Seemingly, neither Tyler nor Mary skipped a beat.

Mary even made it to a few late-season games, and she and Jacob have moved back into their Thibodaux family home. As for that early April nail-biter, Tyler struck out. He went down swinging, but in the grand scheme of things, did it even matter?

"When you're dealing with a heart transplant, everything else seems minor," Mary says. "You need to put it in perspective and think of how this small trial can improve who you are." — Mike Wagenheim
Staking claim to ancestral land

by Dr. John P. Doucet

Before Nicholls was built on the land where it stands, there once stood Acadia Plantation. And before Acadia Plantation, there was nothing. Nothing, that is, except the view from my great-great-great-great-grandfather’s house.

In what is an incredible coincidence, seven generations ago, my ancestors settled directly across the bayou from the future Nicholls. Not simply “nearby,” mind you, but directly across.

To be accurate, however, they didn’t “settle” there. Rather, they “were settled” by the Spanish territorial government, part of the single-largest immigration of Acadians in history. Unlike earlier Acadians who were settled in southwest Louisiana, my ancestors and other Lafourche Acadians were first relocated from maritime Canada to coastal France. Initially, they were enticed by hopes and promises of going to the home of their own ancestors and their own language. But the promises of Louis XVI’s government did little to improve their lot. The king, as it turned out, was supremely busy fending off revolutionaries and guillotines.

Better to join other Acadian families in Louisiana, probably declared the young Jean-Baptiste Doucet. And so, in 1785, with his younger brother, François, and their widowed mother, Marie Precieux, he embarked on the frigate l’Amitié — one of seven famous ships that took nearly 1,600 Acadian refugees to the port of New Orleans for a second chance in the New World. After trusting what representatives declared was fertile and farmable wilderness just downstream of the 18th-century village that became known as Thibodaux, Jean-Baptiste took his mother, brother, Spanish-issue axe and plow, and two pairs of cypress stakes to the east bank of Bayou Lafourche.

Little did he know what immense red-brick sprawl would eventually rise above the oaks and cypresses on the west bank.

Discovering deep family history is a fascinating thing. It makes you wonder about the daily life of your ancestors, about their work, their past times, their behavior at cocktail parties. Did they live in black and white like old photographs? Were they Mac or PC? Cable or dish? Did they microbrew in the back shed?

The question that has really piqued my wonder is, “Why didn’t I inherit that land?”

Imagine, as I often do: If I owned that ancestral property, I could’ve been eyewitness to the great events of Nicholls history. From my rocking chair on the front porch of my little cottage, I could’ve seen all the students over all the years who put detergent in the memorial fountain. I could’ve seen the famous campus streakers of the early ’70s. I could’ve seen Bob Dylan on that blue Harley cross onto grounds of the “poor-man’s Harvard” and try to navigate the shape of Rienzi Circle. (See last issue of Voilà!) I could’ve learned who borrowed the theater director’s hairpiece from Talbot Hall and infamously photographed it at tourist locations around the world. I could have witnessed the inborn behaviors of all the Nicholls presidential pets and perhaps discovered where all the missing bones from the anatomy lab have gone.

Alas, owning Nicholls-front property was not in the cards for me. With Louisiana’s forced heirship laws, I calculate that from Jean-Baptiste’s original 300-arpent-wide bayou-front property I would be left with an uninhabitable 2-inch-wide strip of land — maybe wide enough to grow a single row of carrots if their leaf tops were not too wide.

Not particularly fans of carrots, the Doucets and other descendants of that massive immigration progressively acquired lands farther down the bayou, with my great-great-grandfather reaching the Gulf of Mexico by 1850. A large family, too many sandflies and a few ensuing hurricanes contrived to push the family back up the bayou. And when finally my grandfather parked his houseboat all the way up in Golden Meadow at the beginning of the 20th century, little did he realize the most important reason for leaving his own land was to ensure that his yet unborn grandchildren could one day catch a bus to Nicholls.

No, owning those ancestral lands was not in the cards for me. But 200 years later, those cards were waiting for me in the Student Union in a game of Pedro. Like tens of thousands of other such descendants, I staked my claim.

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.
Thanks to generous donations, Nicholls State University continues to grow in tough budget times. Donor funds are helping the campus create new student scholarships, reward outstanding faculty, renovate older buildings, construct new facilities and much more.

Nicholls and the Nicholls Foundation thank and recognize their supporters, who collectively donated more than $3.2 million during the 2012–13 fiscal year. The Honor Roll list is grouped by giving level as of June 30, 2013. Multiple efforts have been made to publish an accurate, comprehensive list. Please call 985-448-4134 to report an error or omission.

Please consider supporting our students and programs for this upcoming year. To show your commitment to and appreciation for Nicholls, please return the enclosed envelope with a monetary gift.

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Insurance agent’s competitive streak benefits Nicholls

Put Stephanie Hebert in a competitive arena, and she’ll make herself at home. In a region saturated with insurance agents, she’s become a prominent household name with her successful Allstate business in Houma. Likewise, during live auctions at Nicholls fundraisers, crowded with potential buyers, Hebert has become the person to outbid.

“A lot of people think they’re going to get a bargain at these auctions,” she says. “But I love to bid up stuff. If you really want it, you’ll have to outbid me. It’s for charity. It’s an investment in our kids’ higher education.”

A native of Houma, Hebert grew up with a natural affinity for Nicholls. She studied nursing at the university for a few semesters but then quit and got married. Two children and a divorce later, Hebert happened upon an unlikely career in insurance — one that would allow her to give back to her community and alma mater.

“At first, I didn’t know anything about insurance,” she recalls. “But I needed something to do, and a guy in town gave me a chance to sell commercial insurance on commission only.”

When a client told Hebert that Allstate was looking for agents, she pursued the lead and found herself with an Allstate branch 10 months later.

“When I first became an Allstate agent, my philosophy was that I live in the community that does business with me,” she says. “I’ve been blessed and feel like I should give back to the community. Do I go overboard sometimes? Probably so. Do I regret any of it? Definitely not.”

After watching her son, Mitchell, struggle with dyslexia, Hebert created an endowed scholarship at Nicholls specifically for students with dyslexia.

“I believe Nicholls is a great school, and I hate to see its funding cut,” she says. “A lot of locals can’t afford to go to college elsewhere.”

But for Hebert, supporting Nicholls isn’t just about philanthropy; it’s also full of competitive fun. She first reconnected with...
streak benefits Nicholls

Nicholls after attending Women’s Night Out for the Lady Colonels in 2004. Disappointed by the silent auction items available, she asked Dr. David Boudreaux who was in charge of the auction.

“Proud as a peacock, he said, ‘Me.’ I said, ‘Well, it sucks. You left so much money on the table. I’ll call you tomorrow and take this over.’ I know he thought, ‘Yeah, right. She won’t remember that in the morning.’ But I called his office the next day and have been involved ever since.”

Thanks to Hebert’s help in securing auction items and decorating the venue according to each year’s theme, Women’s Night Out profits have soared. And just because she helps secure the auction items doesn’t mean Hebert takes a backseat when the bidding begins.

“My favorite item I won at a Women’s Night Out auction was an autographed Jimmy Buffett poster from Jazz Fest. I outbid Dr. Neil Maki’s wife, Jan, for it, and we still laugh about that,” she says. “It’s a lot of fun for a good cause.” — Stephanie Detillier Verdin

For Allstate agent Stephanie Hebert, live auctions at Nicholls fundraisers have turned into a sport with a cause.
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