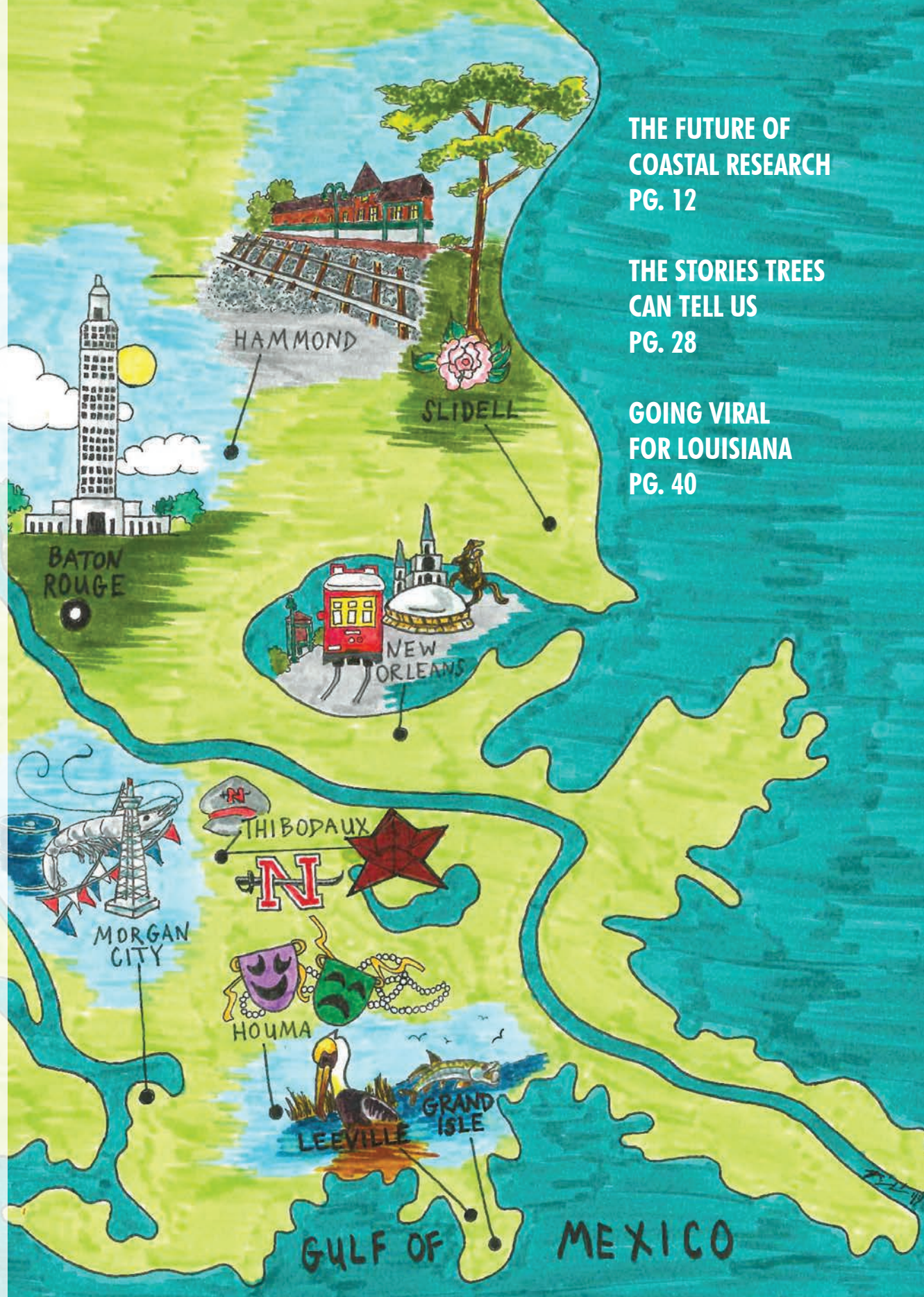


THE COLONNEL

FALL 2019

the magazine of NICHOLLS STATE UNIVERSITY



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COASTAL RESEARCH
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FOR LOUISIANA
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THE COASTAL ISSUE

The Big Picture



GULF OF MEXICO



This could be the future of Coastal Louisiana.

This bleak projection – illustrated by Nicholls alum and Leeville resident Trisha Griffin – is what sea-level rise, coastal erosion and a number of other factors will do to Coastal Louisiana by 2100 unless we do something significant to slow down land loss.

I grew up in the Broadmoor neighborhood in Houma. My boyhood home would be underwater. More importantly, 80 percent of our service area faces the same threat.

With every square foot of land loss, we lose an equal amount of our unique Cajun culture.

Nicholls State University has an obligation to our students and our region to play an active role in reshaping the future of our coast.

This issue of *The Colonel* is dedicated to that mission. In the following pages, you will read about the efforts Nicholls is making to save our coast. They include partnering with organizations like BTNEP to plant trees on barrier islands and growing coastal plants at the Nicholls Farm. It includes partnering with CPRA to build a Coastal Center on campus to expedite research on the Atchafalaya River and Barataria-Terrebonne Basins.

You will also hear from Colonels who are working to preserve the culture and traditions we hold dear, who are educating the future generations on the coastal way of life and who are working hard to preserve our physical land. You will hear what Coastal Louisiana means to us all.

My hope is that after you have turned the final page, you feel the same desire I do: to preserve our culture and save our coast.

Nicholls State University is #ClosesttotheCoast and we won't back down because Colonels never retreat.

- Dr. Jay Clune



the magazine of NICHOLLS STATE UNIVERSITY

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Photographer and author, Bill Guion, believes that oak trees are some of nature's best storytellers. Now, he has taken it upon himself to help tell their stories.



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Illustrations by Trisha Griffin (BA '03)



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Colonel Pride

New Vegetation on Coast Predicted to Benefit Bird Migration

Talk of coastal land loss in Louisiana can often focus on the causes and increased flood risk to low-lying communities. But that impact extends beyond the grounded bipeds.

About 100 million migratory birds rely upon Coastal Louisiana as a place to rest during their migration.

“Louisiana has been constantly losing this habitat, and the birds may have to travel more inland,” says Matthew Sevier, registered environmental manager and board of directors member for the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program. “Birds go through a ‘drop-out’ when they see the first patch of trees where they drop in because they are expecting this land and forest to be here.”

That’s why volunteers from BTNEP, Shell and Nicholls State University headed to Plaquemines Parish. There they planted 3,300 trees and vegetation on over 56 acres of new land. Local scientists predict these efforts will have a positive impact on bird migration. Roots of these planted grasses and trees will help to stabilize this new land, offering area for these migratory birds to catch their breath.

“The ridge project made a brand new landform that did not have vegetation. The most important aspect for a new ridge is to create a maritime forest,” Sevier says.

A maritime forest is a collection of trees on a coast within the direct path of

migrating birds. According to a U.S. Geological Survey, Louisiana has lost 25 percent of the land mapped since 1932.

Most migrating birds that come through the Louisiana coast are from Central and South America. Sevier says these birds fly across the Gulf of Mexico, and some pass without stopping.

“These birds are relying on the forests because they are tired and need a station where they can rest,” Sevier says. “The birds know these native trees because they have been a natural part of the landscape for so long.”

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds drew attention to this issue in an article on endangered species. The wildlife charity based in the U.K. notes, “the birds have nowhere to recover and refuel. They may never gain the energy they need to finish their journeys.”

Sevier says a majority of birds move on from the maritime forests. Yet, some species may stay for their whole migration period because of a lack of competition for food.

“The species of trees planted for restoration are known for survival and help fight the natural

forces,” Sevier says. “Nature is going to take its course and it will fight back against your effort. Each project comes with its pros and cons; it just depends on what element of nature you are fighting against at that time.”

Scientists factor in saltwater intrusion and increased tidal energy when planning restoration projects.

Saltwater intrusion is when saltwater encroaches on freshwater spaces. This slow process creates meandering and curving streams.

Increased tidal energy is

the process of the water current moving faster and becoming more powerful. This leads to the water traveling more inland and can erode more land at a time.

The new ridge had a jump-start by volunteers planting vegetation. Still, the ridge may need several growing seasons to develop its vegetation. According to Sevier, this vegetation is key to increasing the longevity of the ridge.

“If you look at an area of coast that is being highly eroded, come back five weeks later,” he says. “If you know what to look for, the land will be very different. In a year that land may not be there anymore.” — Jessica Moulton

“If you look at an area of coast that is being highly eroded...in a year that land may not be there anymore.”



Volunteers from Shell, BTNEP and Nicholls plant trees on newly created barrier islands in Plaquemines Parish.



MORE THAN A PHYSIOLOGIST

Dr. Gary LaFleur

assistant professor of biological sciences and director of the Center for Bayou Studies
& COASTAL CHAMPION

How did you ultimately end up at Nicholls?

I had been out of Louisiana for about 15 years finishing my masters and Ph.D. While I was doing my postdoc at Brown University, a friend sent me this advertisement that they were looking for a physiologist at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux. Over the years, I had sort of recognized as I went from university to university that you can do really awesome things at a small university. I could see examples of this at Brown and Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, and those universities aren't as big as the flagship university of Louisiana. I was interested to come back to the Louisiana coast. And so when I came to look at Nicholls in 1998, I was immediately attracted to the idea of being on the Louisiana coast, being connected to a small university in a small town and being close to a marine lab like Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON). That immediately became an obvious win-win situation for me.

Why do you think the Center for Bayou Studies is important?

Well, the Center for Bayou Studies was not my idea, but I was immediately on board when I heard about it. A lot of it is connected to our environmental situation. We have wetlands that are in a moment of gradual catastrophe. It's like a slow-moving catastrophe, this coastal land loss. And the next step is to recognize that coastal land loss is not just loss of land, it's the loss of habitat, and the loss of the animals that use that habitat. Then most importantly, this leads to the loss of very unique cultures. And, you know, every state has a somewhat unique culture, but I think most people recognize that the relationship between the coastal residents of Louisiana and the wetlands is really unique.

Tell me about that Pelican.

It comes from an old association that we had with Waubun Labs. They have a long tradition of being able to collect animals for scientific study. They also had some awesome taxidermy. And about 20 years ago, they were ready to throw out all their taxidermy specimens. They brought them to our department, and we put them on display. And I always thought they were pretty cool. I adopted the White Pelican, and thought, well, if we are not going to display it like a museum piece, maybe we can use it when we take our show onto the road. So that white pelican has been with me on the steps of the Capitol when we were demonstrating for fighting budget cuts. The white pelican comes with me when we do festivals and we have brought it down to LUMCON and put it on the front of the boat. We have it at the Chauvin Folk Art Festival. It is a great conversation starter, and somehow it just helps to drive home the idea that Nicholls really is closest to the coast. People might be thinking, "Well, they may not have a live tiger, but look at them walking around with that pelican."

What do you think of Nicholls' role in 'Closest to the Coast?'

Being closest to the coast means not just that you're close enough to get to the coast and back within one day, but it also means that many of the students in our classes are dealing with the consequences of coastal land loss. It's not really just our proximity. It says that we understand coastal issues, we live with coastal issues, we want to be part of solving coastal issues and we're training students to be the next stewards of the coast. Also, a part of Nicholls being closest to the coast means that not only can we be the place that works on these projects to restore the coast, like to rebuild barrier islands or put the plants back there, but by being closest to the coast, we can fulfill the role of being something like the "coastal lifeguard." After these restoration projects get set up, they need to be monitored for 20 to 30 years in order to really be able to make an assessment of how well these different strategies worked. And so, while other people can come in from other countries or other universities and sort of help lay down these different projects, I think a great role for Nicholls is to be the long term monitor, the lifeguard of the coast, so that we can maintain a substantial, historically significant relationship with the large scale project of restoring and learning to live with the changing Louisiana Coast.



Colonel Pride

Le Cercle Francophone de Thibodaux

Once a week, a group of locals from up the bayou, down the bayou and everywhere in between gather around a table to speak their “*langue maternelle*.”

Le Cercle Francophone sits the guests in a circle, or square, inside the Jean Lafitte Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center. Overlooking Bayou Lafourche, the group drinks coffee and works to preserve their French heritage.

“We want people to know they don’t have to be afraid of speaking French,” says Marlene Toups, (BA ‘71, MEd ‘78), a former English teacher who helps organize the group. “Just like English, there are different levels of French. We’re trying to make other people aware, even if they just know a little bit, they can speak it.”

The group was first organized in 2008. It was then that Dr. Robin White, associate professor of French and English, met Toups and others who could speak the language.

“My mind was blown because I didn’t realize so many people spoke

French in the Bayou Region,” she says. “Before I knew it, we had all these people coming regularly who could speak French.”

There is no membership and no set discussion topic each week. Instead, it’s an excuse to grab a cup of coffee with old friends, talk about current events and remember the good old days. All while speaking French. Many of the regulars grew up speaking French in their home. Others want to learn a second language. All love to chat and share stories. Martha Hodnett (BA ‘72) sees this as a chance to preserve Cajun traditions.

“It’s a heritage language in Louisiana,” Hodnett says. “Even if your name isn’t Boudreaux or Theriot, this is our history.”

French Tables are not new, nor are they unique to the Bayou Region. Dozens of groups across over 20 cities and towns in Louisiana and Texas have been gathering for over two decades. They advertise through local tourism offices and by word of mouth. It’s not uncommon for French citizens to pop in while visiting the states. The Thibodaux French Table



has had eight French citizens at one time before.

Dr. White's students will often visit the group during the semester. Many newcomers visit for the first time not confident in their French. But once they get comfortable, they fit right in.

"To really learn the language you have to be immersed in it, so I try to get my students to visit the group at least once during the semester," Dr. White says.

It's easy for the group to help the students because they are trying to pass the language down in their own families. With pride, Toups' 5-year-old grandson pronounces "*Les moustiques sortent à cinq heures,*" or "The mosquitoes come out at 5 p.m."

It's important, Hodnett says, referencing the adage, "to know where you're going, you have to know where you've been."

"Every hurricane we have, like Katrina, Juan and Betsy, people leave. And every time someone leaves, their stories go with them," Hodnett says. "If we don't collect them now, they're lost." — *Jacob Batte*



Regulars at Le Cercle Francophone de Thibodaux keep the French language alive in South Louisiana.

Cajun Glossary

Bouder [boo•day] n.
pout

C'est bon [say•bohn]
it is good

Chaoui [shah•wee] n.
raccoon

Chevrette [she•vret] n.
shrimp

Couillon [coo•yawn] n.
foolish person

Frissons [free•son] n.
goosebumps

Honte [hont] adj.
embarrassed

Pirogue [pee•rog] n.
shallow, single-person canoe

Sauce piquante
[saws•pee•kawnt] n.
tomato-based Creole sauce

Marais [mah•rey] n.
marsh

Écrevisses [a•creh•veh•see] n.
crawfish

Pauvre Bête' [pawv•bet] n.
poor thing

Patasa [pah•tah•sah] n.
freshwater fish

Regardez Donc [re•gar•day•don]
look at that

Rôder [row•day] v.
to run the streets

Rougarou [roo•gah•roo] n.
werewolf from cajun folklore

Touche Pas [too•sh•pa] v.
don't touch

Coastal Center Coming to Nicholls Campus



The Atchafalaya River model may be similar to the Mississippi River model (pictured above) located at The Water Campus in Baton Rouge.

Nicholls State University could soon help turn the tide of coastal land loss with a new Coastal Center on campus.

The Center will house an Atchafalaya River basin model that will aid in the research of protecting and restoring our coast. So far, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority secured \$5 million for a center.

The Coastal Resources Center is in the preliminary stages for planning and programming. Still, it is a big win for Nicholls, says Dr. John Doucet, Dean of the College of Sciences and Technology and director of Coastal Initiatives. Students and scientists alike will use research from a model to rebuild and restore the coast.

“The Atchafalaya can serve as a sediment and nutrient source to help mitigate coastal issues,” he says.

Nicholls President Dr. Jay Clune has charged a small group of faculty and the community to explore the project. Leading the

committee are Dr. Doucet and Executive Vice President Alex Arceneaux.

The committee will focus on space and programming needs for outreach, research and a shared work environment. This includes investigating various model types, building designs, programming aspects and fundraising opportunities.

Several types of models are being explored, including physical and numerical. Dr. Gary Lafleur, associate professor of biology, says having a model is important when changing the flow of water and sediment.

Altering sediment flow could lead to land buildup, Dr. LaFleur says, but he would not suggest making a change lightly.

In the Terrebonne Basin, the marsh has been transitioning to open water. That water is encroaching on coastal communities.

Yet, researchers are also seeing land build-up because of sediment movement. One of those areas is the Wax Lake Outlet in



“Before you really change the course of the water, you can see it physically work on that river center model... That’s why having this as a tool is useful. It lessens the possibility of unintended consequences.”



St. Mary Parish.

“When you see that place where land is being built, it is really tempting to say to yourself, I want that to happen right where we are losing land,” Dr. LaFleur says. “Conceptually, it seems like you could mimic what is going on in Wax Lake in the Terrebonne Bay. But that is risky to assume it will work the same way.”

Dr. LaFleur says researchers can use the model to try different scenarios. After many tweaks, they can be confident that the sediment flow will work as desired.

“Before you change the course of the water, you can see it work on a river center model,” he says. “Because in the worst-case scenario, instead of the sediment dropping where you want to drop it, by the coast, it might settle elsewhere, and clog a waterway. That’s why having this as a tool is useful. It lessens the possibility of unintended consequences.”

A \$2.5 million coastal business incubator is planned to go along with the center, says Arceneaux.

Teaming the two centers will join science, innovation and entrepreneurship for the betterment of the coast, he says.

—Cain Madden

SAVING THE COAST...

In 1996, the coastal projections predicted that all of the Louisiana barrier islands would be gone by 2015.

Yet, four years since that disappearance date, many remain because Louisiana conservationists took action to prevent those projections from coming true.

“If we would have done nothing since 1996, the barrier islands would have been gone by now. But instead of losing all of the islands, we’ve been able to maintain what we’ve had since 96, and even maybe added just a little bit more,” say Dr. Quenton Fontenot, head of the department of biological sciences.

Looking forward, coastal projections are again bleak. Over the next 50 years, Louisiana is projected to lose 4,120 square miles, and many of the barrier islands, along with marsh and swamp land, are among the impacts of this loss.

Without barrier islands, swamps and marshes, coastal communities become more vulnerable to flooding during storm surges.

Fontenot says he hopes the Nicholls Farm can play a part in saving the coast from that potential reality. He says the Farm can play a key

role in a few ways, growing the plants needed to help conserve and save land and educating students to work toward the goals.

Some of the plants being grown include bitter panicum grass, sand live oaks, saline tolerant cypress trees and mangroves.

Bitter panicum is a sand tolerant plant that tends to hold sand and build its own dunes, which is important for maintaining the land.

The sand live oak disappeared from the Louisiana coast, so they had to go to Mississippi to import some. The tree tends to grow taller and provides habitat for animals such as migratory birds.

Fontenot says seeds were collected from cypress trees in Plaquemines Parish, which is a saline heavy water. The hope is they have found a naturally occurring cypress tree that can withstand the salt water from storm surges and help maintain animal habitat.

Each year, Nicholls students plant 500 to 2,000 black mangroves on the barrier islands. The plant helps build habitat and nutrients for the nurseries for seafood like shrimp, crabs and fish.

ONE PLANT AT A TIME

In addition to providing habitat, the black mangrove is also a big plant that slows down the impact of incoming waves during storm surges.

“This is a very important component,” Fontenot says. “The farm is a hub of coastal and Louisiana native plant activity. We have the facilities to produce and grow the plants we need. The farm is huge.”

The farm shows students how you care for these plants, what these plants are and the amount of effort that it takes to go from growing plants, harvesting plants and bringing the native species back to the coast.

“It gives them a good idea of the scale of the effort that’s needed to restore a coast,” Fontenot says. “So instead of sitting around just complaining about coastal land loss, they actually get to do something.”

In addition to that, many students will earn research opportunities that will help them produce essays and papers.

All that combined, Fontenot says one of the things he hears from area employers about Nicholls graduates is that they already

understand the issues of coastal land loss and what needs to be done.

“They can start doing their jobs on day one,” he says. “There’s no warm up period.”

The farm is also growing, most recently with the addition of a cross-country track. During the fall of 2018, the Nicholls farm enabled Nicholls athletics to host a cross-country invitational for the first time in more than a decade.

While the track is a tool that can help students and also help promote Nicholls biology, it’s not the last expansion planned.

Nicholls is working on bringing in more partners to help grow more plants to help protect the coast. One addition would be a bridge that will open up more of the property, which includes former crawfish ponds that could be converted into a growth space for additional aquatic plant species.

“The future of the farm is bright,” Fontenot says. “We’re going to continue to grow and continue to produce data and produce information relevant to propagate our coasts with good plants.” — *Cain Madden*



Biological Sciences Department Head Dr. Quenton Fontenot drives as students plant the next crop of bitter panicum, a dune grass used to stabilize habitats on barrier island sandy dunes and beaches.

Communication and the Coast



Nicki Boudreaux

On average, Louisiana loses a football field of land per hour. We've all heard that statistic time and time again regarding land lost to coastal erosion, sea-level rise and other factors. The first time I heard it was in the late 1990s, and my passion for all things Coastal Louisiana was born.

But for me, the story has always gone much deeper than the loss of land. It's the other stories that speak to me. The fisherman who lost his favorite fishing spot because the salinity of the water has changed. The resident who used to stand on his front porch to gaze across his acreage of property, now looking out at an expanse of sea. The communities who face a loss of their culture because their land is no longer sustainable. Those stories are sometimes hard to tell, but they are necessary for people to understand the plight of coastal Louisianians.

But not all stories are sad. There are stories of new land being built from ancient sand in the Gulf of Mexico. There are stories of the American Indians who have worked so hard to keep their culture alive with each passing generation. There are stories of residents who have worked to adapt their lives and their livelihoods to the changing landscape.

As a communication professional, I am intrigued by how we share these stories, and in Fall 2018, the mass communication department introduced an Environmental Communications course to do just that. Through this course, students became coastal storytellers. They studied and told stories of how invasive species threaten our coast, how fisheries have changed, how the oil and gas industry has worked to right the wrongs of the past and how the state is building new coastline through Master Plan projects. But the students learned so much more. Some saw the Gulf of Mexico for the first time. Some boated down the beautiful Bayou Lafourche, studying the banks of the bayou from a different perspective. They all sank their toes into new beach built on Elmer's Island and got a first-hand look at the economic powerhouse that is Port Fourchon. They met shrimpers and fishermen, scientists and coastal natives, and they told their stories.

What started as an opportunity to tell stories of what was happening to the land quickly became an opportunity to tell the story of what was happening to the people and the wildlife. Through partnerships with Port Fourchon, Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, Restore or Retreat and The National Audubon Society, we introduced Nicholls students to the people, the culture, the economy, the science, the government and the community initiatives behind saving and restoring our coast.

Before teaching this class, I thought I knew and understood all things Coastal Louisiana. I was born and raised on Bayou Lafourche. I have read extensively about coastal issues. But while teaching this course, I realized there was so much I didn't know.

Perhaps what I learned the most is that the collective voice of Louisiana residents is not one of despair or panic. It is one of resiliency and adaptation. The fighting spirit of Louisiana residents lives on, and that is the story that needs telling. People across the country need to know how Port Fourchon impacts the national economy, how hurricane protection is imperative and how public policy must shape our future. But they also need to know the humanity. The Cajun fisherman who has found a new fishing spot rather than retreating. The resident who has embraced the water that is where land once was, and who uses every opportunity to tell his story. The communities who have kept their culture alive by relocating en masse, not letting the loss of land be the end of their story.

And at Nicholls, our mass communication students will continue to tell those stories, helping our nation and our world remember why ours is a home worth saving. — Nicki Boudreaux

Mapping

A gift for the gadget enthusiast. The source of overhead shots from sporting events. A proposed delivery platform for Amazon packages.

Those are images that may first leap to mind for many people when they hear the word "drones."

When Dr. Balaji Ramachandran, associate professor of geomatics, hears "drones," he first thinks of data, data that is an essential weapon in the war to preserve the state's vanishing coastline.

"Everyone thinks about the airframes," he says. "But the cool thing is data."

Dr. Ramachandran first saw the value of drones to his profession in 2005 when he joined the Nicholls State University faculty.

Drones allow geomatics researchers to gather information more efficiently than other means.

Dr. Ramachandran explains that his field is more than plotting distances and elevations. Geomatics means both locating and describing items on the planet – on its surface, below sea-level and in the air.

That requires data and drones are an ideal way to amass that data.

They can collect images across several light spectrums. Drones can capture visible to infrared to near-infrared to hyper-spectral. The technology is improving to where cameras can distinguish between the various shades of a particular color.

"It jacks up your data massively," Dr. Ramachandran says.

From those images, researchers can create the vector points used to make 3D models. This allows researchers to factor in items like the height of vegetation and color to determine plant species.

The models can differentiate between mangrove growth and marsh grasses on barrier islands. They can even show if the plants are thriving or floundering.

In coastal preservation, those differences matter, Dr. Ramachandran says. Healthy plants play a vital role in the fight to maintain coastline and some are better at it than others.

Dr. Ramachandran says a weakness of many coastal-preservation plans is monitoring.

a Moving Target

Drones could bolster that with more frequent data collection.

He argues it is not enough to do annual or semi-annual surveys, as called for in some plans.

“Every time there is a disturbance in the Gulf, all of the sediments that you have found can be wiped out in a few minutes if a big storm surge comes in,” he says.

Where drones are at a disadvantage is on projects that cover large areas.

Part of the problem is mechanical. At most, a drone can last 45 minutes on a battery charge. Another problem is regulatory.

Nicholls’ drones fall under the Federal Aviation Administration–Certification of Waiver or Authorization. This means that operators can only fly drones that weigh 55 pounds or fewer. The drones must have electric motors and can only fly during the day. They must stay below 400 feet in altitude and never over people. And only if the craft stays in sight of the operator.

The technology part, at least, is changing.

Ramachandran says that not only are the airframes improving, but their sensors and software are also getting better.

He uses his phone to call up video from the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International’s 2017 Xponential in Dallas.

On the screen, brightly lit drones flit about in an elaborate pattern around a mockup of a bridge.

Ramachandran explains that this is “swarming,” a pre-programmed pattern of follow-the-leader. The technique was on display at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, and the 2019 Super Bowl in Atlanta.

He says that while those displays are impressive; they are not the real value of swarming.

The trade show display illustrated how fast a flock of drones could complete a bridge inspection.

Ramachandran says he can see a time when the drones can provide more accurate predictions of a



hurricane. A drone can drop into the eye of a hurricane and track it from top to bottom.

Nicholls aims to remain at the forefront of drone research. The Louisiana Board of

Regents recently awarded Dr. Ramachandran and colleagues at Tulane University a \$687,509 grant. The grant is to buy materials for training faculty and students in drone operations. He seeks to train people to the level of Part 107 licenses.

This grant is important for its role in coastal preservation. It’s also important because it ensures that students will continue to hone marketable skills.

“We have to take the leadership role.”

— James Stewart



Dr. Balaji Ramachandran (middle right) explains to Rep. Garret Graves (middle left) how drones can be used to study the coast.

WHAT DOES COASTAL



Deanna Lafont (BA '02) from Cut Off

"I didn't realize the implications of growing up in a coastal area until I was older. I grew up on a working bayou which meant tug boats, shrimp boats and waiting on the bridges. I grew up fishing, hunting and spending time on Grand Isle. We spent a lot of time in the Golden Meadow area with family, speaking French. I didn't understand that other people didn't grow up that way. One of the biggest things that made me realize I had grown up somewhere special was the first time I brought friends from college who were from New Orleans to Cut Off. They had already gone through the initial shock of moving to Thibodaux but seeing where I grew up through their eyes the first time was interesting, it was telling. Looking back on it as an adult, it really helped me to realize that this area is special and that it should be preserved."

"I'm from down the bayou. I was raised on my Cajun heritage, and any time I get angry or sad or emotional, you can hear the Cajun come out of me. One of the reasons I am an education major is because I want to introduce that same heritage to the next generation of students. I would love very much for those future generations to get the opportunity to be a Cajun, and to experience the same things I did growing up in South Louisiana. I want them to be able to experience those things, and enjoy those things because being Cajun is an essential part of being from the Bayou Region."



Jeremy Serigny, sophomore from Larose



Tyler Legnon, junior from Gibson

"I love growing up in South Louisiana because things that people have to go out of there way to do, like going fishing or crabbing, I can do in my front yard. Some of my favorite memories was going out and fishing along Bayou Black with my family. We had pet turtles and pet alligators. It was a unique experience. When I think about the coast, I automatically think about Grand Isle and how much it has changed in just my lifetime. I'm only 20 but I can remember Grand Isle when I was six years old and how different it is since Hurricane Katrina. Where the beach used to start and where it is now is way different because of land loss. Sooner or later, the coast is going to be at our doorstep, and when that happens, it'll be too late to change anything. I want a south Louisiana that our kids can enjoy. Everything that I cherished, I want my kids and grandkids to experience."

"This is my home. It will always be my home. Having lived in other areas, I can safely say I never want to leave. As a child, I sometimes felt there wasn't enough to do, or enough opportunities. But as I got older, I realized how wrong I was; I was just looking in the wrong places. Saving the coast means saving my home, too. I want my children to have some of the same experiences I had as a child. I want to see more coastal protection and restoration projects. And while the oil and gas industry and fishing industries – commercial and recreational – have co-existed for many decades, I worry that our area may be forced to make a choice and prioritize one over the other. I hope that we can continue to find a way for all of that to continue to co-exist for the betterment of our area."



Brennan Matherne (BA '03) from Larose

LOUISIANA MEAN TO YOU?



"Saving the coast is so important because we need to keep our heritage and our culture. We have such a unique culture and there is so much history built into these lands. We need to do our best to save it. It's rough now whenever there is a storm. I'm from Gibson, and it doesn't take much rain to flood us out. I can only imagine what people who live closer to the coast have to deal with. This area has been such a big part of my life, so to lose that land would be like losing a part of me."

Devon Williams, senior from Gibson

"When you live in such a natural environment like the bayou, there is never a dull moment. There are trails to explore on 4-wheelers, lakes and canals to explore by boat and all the hunting and fishing you could ask for. It is an amazing place to be raised. When you grow up, you appreciate the beauty and challenges we face daily. The extreme temperatures and volatile weather let you know the "Sportsman's Paradise" isn't for everyone but the beauty and bounty of mother nature make it worth it. To me, Coastal Louisiana is home. Without question, the Cajun culture is the single thing that sets us apart from other coastal areas. Our food, our music, our Friday night traditions; all of these things make us who we are. I'm proud to be an ambassador of the Acadian experience. I never want to live more than a few hours away from Grand Isle and New Orleans. If I had to you might as well put me in the grave."



Norby Chabert (BA '01) from Chauvin



"Coastal Louisiana is home. It's a home where we have jobs, seafood, fishing, the beach and family. It's so unique simply because of its food, its people and its culture. You truly don't realize what you have until it's gone. We should not take for granted the land and the coast that we walk each day. Thankfully, we have coastal advocacy groups such as Restore or Retreat fighting for our coast. Saving our coast is saving our future, our history and our culture."

Alexis Kiger, senior from Larose

"Saving the coast is like preserving an invaluable, antique photograph – one that could never be reprinted or recreated. The image keeps fading but with the right means, resources, dedication and contribution, there can be restoration. This photograph isn't merely a visual documentation; it is a component of my soul, my spirit. My birth, my youth, my maturity and this moment have all transpired on the coast. Saving the coast would be saving parts of me and my family, along with saving everyone else who shares the same sentiments. Saving the coast would be prolonging the lives of all inhabitants of the coast, great and small. Saving the coast would be allowing some of us to peacefully exist and others of us to have recreational enjoyment and ecological entertainment. Saving the coast would be preventing it from being discarded and eliminated. Once it's gone, it will never reappear."



Trisha Griffin (BA '03) from Leeville

Local Music Society Preserves Cajun Music

The entertainment on this Wednesday night at Gina's at the Legion seems like a thrown-together group having a good time.

Sitting in a semi-closed circle, the band members relax in a collection of folding chairs and stools, one even sitting on a milk box carrier.

They're holding instruments – a collection of strings and percussions – that match the environment. An unashamed antithesis to modern music and culture.

Cajun French is the language of their songs. Many of the group here tonight grew up speaking it with their families.

The music fits the ambiance. As they sing and have fun, the dimmed lights of the restaurant make the circle resemble that of a campfire.

The group has the attention of all in the restaurant. Well, at least from those old enough to appreciate the music. Kids run through the circle, playing tag and screaming when they are "it." For the adults, it's a regular *fais*

do-do. Older couples slow dance around the circle, moving to the rhythm of songs they've known for years. Others sway to the music or tap their feet to the beat.

This is the Cajun Music Preservation Society at its finest.

Their jam sessions are one of their main draws. But it's only a small part of what the award-winning organization accomplishes every year.

The Society is an offshoot of the Nicholls State University event, Swamp Stomp, itself an ode to Cajun and Zydeco music. Their mission is to preserve traditional Cajun music and provide an avenue for local artists to express themselves.

Led by Dr. Quenton Fontenot, each of the original members has a tie back to Nicholls. Dr. Fontenot, Dr. Gary LaFleur and Dr. Allyse Ferrara are Nicholls biology faculty. Misty McElroy is the campus photographer and social media manager. Tysman Charpentier is a Nicholls alum.

For Dr. Fontenot, his involvement links back to his childhood and his deep love for Cajun music and culture. He can recall how he and his father

would listen to music when going hunting or fishing.

"Sitting in the car for all those trips, which were some of the most fun times of my childhood, I associated Cajun music with happiness," he says.

Through the Society, Dr. Fontenot has developed a passion for the accordion. The German instrument is critical to Cajun music. Over many jam sessions, he has grown from a novice to an accomplished player.

Like the accordion, the instruments used are a testament to the legacy of Cajun music.

There are no amplifiers or modern-day electronics, a callback to a time when instruments were simple and accessible. The original instruments of the genre are banjo, fiddle, accordion and triangle. As these instruments are all cheaper, it allows anyone who would like to learn Cajun music the chance to join. This helps to spread the culture the organization is working to preserve.

While the group has a consistent amount of people show up, there is a large turnover rate for the musicians, Dr. Fontenot says.



Founding members of the Cajun Music Preservation Society Dr. Gary LaFleur, Dr. Quenton Fontenot, Dr. Allyse Ferrara, Misty McElroy and Tysmen Charpentier pose with the Flag of Acadiana.





Throughout the year, the Society puts on their popular Cajun music jam session at Gina's at the Legion.

“This is true Cajun music, not Swamp Pop or Zydeco, but traditional French music, so it reaches out to all generations both young and old.”

They come and learn traditional Cajun music and then leave the organization to play music elsewhere.

Preserving the culture of true Cajun music requires more than the regular jam sessions.

Each year, the Society raises money to book Cajun artists and bands for events and festivals. Since its creation, the Society has spent more than \$45,000 lining up

festivals with Cajun musicians. By doing the work for them, it gives the festivals an incentive to include Cajun music in their event.

McElroy, cites the music's style as a reason for their success. She enjoys the music for the same reason as Dr. Fontenot: it's the music of her childhood.

“This is true Cajun music, not Swamp Pop or Zydeco, but traditional French music, so it

reaches out to all generations both young and old,” she says.

McElroy and Dr. Fontenot agree that the Society's most fulfilling moments occur on those Wednesday nights. The music reaches out to the entire audience, and though many do not speak French or understand the words to the songs, it is irrelevant. It is the feeling that the music gives the listeners, the

home and campfire quality to the music that makes it shine.

“Seeing older couples dance to your music, or clap or sing along while these young children are having fun during the show is what makes the organization so worthwhile,” Dr. Fontenot says. “These kids will grow up in the music, and will hopefully carry it on to the next generation, so we never lose it.” — Al Wilson

A Tradition on the Bayou

When alumni think back on their experience as a Colonel, often the Pirogue Races that occur during Homecoming and Greek weeks are one of the highlights.

The unique Nicholls State University tradition on Bayou Lafourche began in 1953 when members of the ROTC organized the first race from Raceland to Thibodaux. Back then, it took more than three hours to

complete, but today the race is approximately 100 yards and takes less than 10 minutes as contestants on the bayou near Elkins Hall race to a buoy and back.

Over the years, winners have been honored in several ways and today the Student Programming Board awards the Golden Paddle.

Several alumni spoke about the tradition.



John L. Weimer III SGA President 1974-76

Back in the day, the pirogue races were handled by the freshman class president. The event had been dwindling in participation levels, and it was suggested that we should discontinue it. I talked to a lot of people, and decided we should continue the tradition. We kind of reformulated the races and drew a really nice crowd my freshman year, that would have been 1972-73. We expanded it and promoted it better and ended up having a lot of fun. We ended up having a queen of the pirogue races, a band playing and just made it a more social event, beyond pirogue races.

A couple of years later, a tradition developed when streaking became popular in the country. Streaking permeated into our pirogue races. For a few years, someone would streak the pirogue races on skis, and that enhanced the interest in the event a lot.

There had been a tradition where you throw the freshman class president into the bayou. I made sure I had sufficient body guards to prevent that from happening.

My job during the race was to make sure they were conducted as fairly as they could have been, make sure nobody took shortcuts that they were going to the buoys and turning

around and coming back. And that everyone got out safe. I think someone handed me a cigar when it was over for a job well done.

I was told it had been a tradition for a long, long time. That sold me on trying to enhance the participation. I think traditions are important for every university. Bayou Lafourche is such a magnificent asset to Thibodaux, Nicholls and the surrounding region. The bayou was a major means of transportation once upon a time, and pirogues were a big part of that transportation. Besides that, it's just a fun way to spend an afternoon and keep a good tradition going.



Brittany Taraba **SGA President 2010-11**

My first year (Fall 2007) it was mostly the Greek organizations who participated. Each year the event grew a little, and participation was more diverse. It was always a fun event to watch and cheer on. There was bound to be at least one mid-race crash or canoe flip.

One year we held the races as part of Greek Week, and I helped coordinate. I think they are unique to the spirit of Nicholls. My family lives in Monroe, and ULM is right on the bayou. They don't have races like we do. The university embraces traditions, and those races brought everyone together.

That was the first time I got to cheer on my Delta Zeta sisters in friendly competition. Delta Zeta actually took home first place in 2007, so that was a great moment. I looked forward to them every year. Even though you hoped your own group won, it was fun cheering everyone who raced on.

Adam Lefort **SGA President 2014-15**

During my time at Nicholls the races were held during Homecoming Week and Greek Week. The races were fun and one of the highlights of homecoming week for me. I know in the past, they used to do some around Crawfish Day for the student body, but it was not like that during my time.

Each time I did the races, I had a new partner. Normally I signed up to represent an organization on campus. My first year I participated with Circle K with Kade Smith since he was president, and I was vice president.

The next year I participated on behalf of SGA and homecoming court with my vice president Mary Sauce. My last year, I raced with Fallon Authement and we represented the past Homecoming King and Queen of Nicholls. Each time was exciting, but we were not good at all. Our main goal was not to fall into the bayou, which we achieved. We would always start off good, but once it came to turning around, we could not maneuver the paddles and always ended up off to the side and finishing last. It was always about the thrill of trying to win and then

the change to just trying to stay afloat when you can start seeing the water fill the pirogue.

During my time as SGA President, my main platform was tradition. Because of that, the Pirogue Races are very important to me and Nicholls. I would always hear from old alumni who joked about having to pirogue up the bayou to get to Elkins, and it reminds me of how Nicholls and Thibodaux have grown. Pirogues are such an important part of our Bayou Culture and the Pirogue Races allows current students to experience it for themselves.



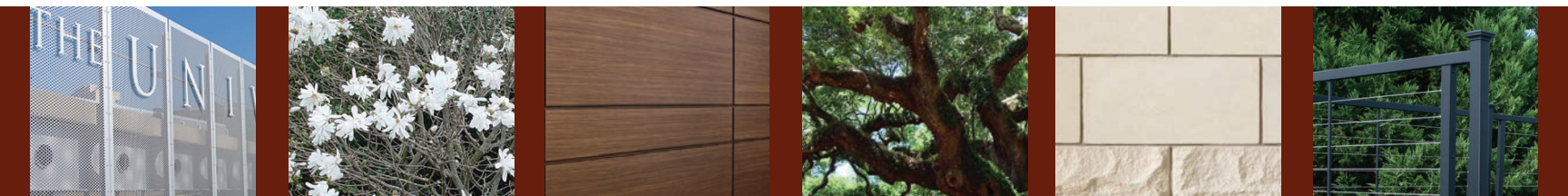
PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

As an institution of higher learning, it is our obligation to the Bayou Region to plan for the future. The Nicholls State University campus will transition over the next 25 years to a forward-thinking urban environment able to educate the students of tomorrow and serve as a destination for the surrounding community.

Today



25-year plan



GO FOR A WALK

New and widened sidewalks, trees and lighting will open up inviting pathways for students to casually stroll to class, to the cafeteria or to a tailgate ahead of a Colonel football game. There is no way to make campus feel more connected than by giving you that physical path to take you anywhere you need to go. On the modern Nicholls campus, you can park at Guidry Stadium and walk to the Lanny D. Ledet Culinary Arts Building without feeling like it's taking forever to get there. You might even want to slow down to take in the view.

HIT THE BOOKS IN A NEW LIBRARY

Over the next 25 years, new academic buildings will be built and classrooms will be renovated but no single space will play a bigger role for our students' future than Ellender Memorial Library. We can create a more open and appealing environment to study by tearing down many of the interior walls. Our future library will add a cafe, auditorium, Academic Achievement Center, Student Athletic Center and testing center. With these changes, Ellender Memorial Library will become a favorite space where our students can reach their full potential.

LIVE AND PLAY

With more than 450 events held each school year on campus, there is always something for students and the greater Nicholls community to do. Our plan focuses on enhancing what we currently have with a renovated Bollinger Student Union and expanded Callais Rec Center, as well as introducing new buildings such as a Greek Village. The addition of an auditorium along Bowie Road would provide additional space for community functions, large programs and even graduation.

BRINGING ATHLETICS BACK TO YOU

After recent renovations to Stopher Gym, Didier Field and Swanner Field, the announcement of the Football Operations Center at Barker Hall and planned community partnerships to benefit track and field, many of our facilities are already top-notch. Our vision of the future is to maintain these facilities while making the athletics offices more accessible and creating more revenue-generating opportunities. These efforts will ensure that Nicholls athletics remain competitive in the Southland Conference in all 17 sports for years to come.

COME BACK HOME

As Nicholls grows, so does its alumni base. We know how much you care for your alma mater and we want to make sure you feel welcome when you return to campus. With a new Alumni Center, we can provide a central location for events such as twice-annual Grad Expos, reunions, the Alumni Crawfish Boil, Homecoming events and watch parties for away Nicholls sporting events. With this new Alumni Center, we will be creating a home for generations of Colonels.



To see the entire Campus Master Plan, visit nicholls.edu/president/campus-master-plan.

Colonel Pride

Whatcha Got Cookin'?

Black-Eyed Pea-Battered Shrimp

As prepared by Chef John Folse

Ingredients

3/4 cup black-eyed peas, cooked
36 (16–20 count) shrimp, head-on
1/4 cup diced onion
1 tbsp minced garlic
1/8 tsp ground ginger
Creole seasoning to taste
salt and black pepper to taste
granulated garlic to taste
2 large eggs
1/4 cup olive oil
1 1/4 cups beer
Louisiana Hot Sauce to taste
2 cups flour
1 quart vegetable oil

Directions

Peel the shells from the tail of the shrimp, being careful not to remove the head. Devein shrimp, then set aside. In the bowl of a food processor, combine the black-eyed peas, onion, minced garlic, ginger, Creole seasoning, salt, pepper and granulated garlic. Blend on high speed 2-3 minutes or until peas are coarsely chopped. Add the eggs, olive oil, beer and hot sauce. Blend 1-2 minutes or until puréed. Add the flour, and blend 1-2 additional minutes. Pour black-eyed pea batter into a ceramic bowl, then set aside. In a home-style deep-fryer such as a FryDaddy® or a large cast iron pot, heat 3 inches of oil to 350 degrees, or according to manufacturer's directions. Dip only the shrimp tails into batter and allow all excess to drain. Gently place the shrimp into the deep-fryer and cook until golden brown and partially floating. Remove from oil and drain on paper towels. Serve hot with your favorite dipping sauce.



Chef John Folse is the namesake of the Culinary Institute at Nicholls State University. Born in St. James Parish, he learned early that the secrets of Cajun cooking lay in the unique ingredients of Louisiana's swamp floor pantry. Folse has seasoned these raw ingredients with his passion for Louisiana culture, and from his cast iron pots emerged Chef John Folse & Company. Forty years of culinary excellence later, Folse is still adding ingredients to the corporate gumbo he calls Chef John Folse & Company, which is as diverse as the Louisiana landscape, and he would not want it any other way.

In the old days, people made frying batters with flour and eggs, but would also purée vegetables from their gardens to use in batters. Shrimp are deep-fried every day in Louisiana, but the types of batter used to coat and flavor them are as varied as the cooks preparing the seafood. This batter, in this recipe, is almost like a traditional tempura batter.

This recipe was created by Dr. Robert Harrington, former dean of the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute at Nicholls State University.

COLONELS

RETREAT

LAGER



THE OFFICIALLY LICENSED BEER OF NICHOLLS STATE UNIVERSITY

COMING OCTOBER
TO A GETAWAY NEAR YOU!

MS. FELTERMAN GOES TO WASHINGTON

What do a bayou, a courtroom and the Pentagon all have in common? They are all places where Michelle Felterman has excelled.

By Jacob Batte
Photos by Misty Leigh McElroy
Illustration by Akaira Sutton



You could find her waist-deep in muddy waters collecting alligator gar. You could find her standing in front of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals after successfully arguing her first case. You could find her in the Pentagon as a John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellow. These are all things she has done in the last five years.

Today, she's a National Environmental Policy Act project manager for the Navy in Jacksonville, Florida, where she has to use her field, legal and policy experience daily.

It's easy to see how she's made it this far. She has a commitment to the Louisiana coast, a passion for the Cajun culture and a dedication to her craft. She has also made a few critical decisions on a whim along the way.

"You would think I would be an extremely logical person being a lawyer, but if I hear something and it sounds like it will work out, I've just learned to trust the process; go with my gut," she says.

The first of those decisions happened as a sophomore at Louisiana State University. The rising star student changed the course of her life over a couple of fish nuts.

HEADING HOME

The Patterson native first enrolled at LSU but after two years, something didn't feel right. It's not that Felterman disliked her time in Baton Rouge. But she craved more interaction with her professors and a curriculum focused on the problems facing Louisiana's coasts.

"LSU is a great school, but their research is focused on big-picture ecosystems, which we need, but

Nicholls State University is tailored to this ecosystem, this region, which is a big draw to me," Felterman says. "It's what I want my career to focus on."

So on a whim, she visited Nicholls. Growing up 40 minutes from the campus, she knew that it housed a marine biology program. She met with Dr. Quenton Fontenot, then a professor of biological sciences. The meeting was memorable for both sides.

Dr. Fontenot often deals with students transferring in because they couldn't cut it at larger institutions. This explains his surprise when he saw Felterman's transcripts.

"Whoa, you've got a 4.0? You need to come here," Felterman remembers him saying. "So he started putting me in classes right there."

The selling point for Felterman would come a few moments later. A group of students stopped by Dr. Fontenot's office with a question about what to do with a certain piece of inventory.

"They said, 'Quenton, we have all these gar gonads, what do you want us to do with them?' and immediately I was like, 'Oh my God, those students were just walking around with gar gonads. I want to do that,'" Felterman says.

MAKING AN IMPRESSION

It took Felterman fewer than two weeks to get noticed by her biological sciences professors. Dr. Gary LaFleur, associate professor of biological sciences and director of the Center for Bayou Studies, recognized that Felterman was a talented scientist and student. So, he invited the undergrad to take part in Calypseaux, the Cajun initiation for new biology graduate



students. It involves an immersive weekend into the South Louisiana ecosystem and culture.

"She came to us with an innate knowledge of the lay of the land, and many students don't have that," Dr. LaFleur says. "She grew up hunting and fishing with her family, and all of that set the stage in her for understanding the Louisiana Coast more than a lot of our students did. We didn't teach her that, she came with that knowledge. In many aspects, she came here already on the same page as us."

It was there she met Dr. Enmin Zou, professor of biological sciences. Dr. Zou was looking for a student to aid him in a research project.

"I can still remember clearly, vividly the first time I met Michelle," says Dr. Zou. "We met in the library of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium, and I gave her a

research job on the spot, right away. I noticed she was unusual."

When Dr. Zou says unusual, he means it in a good way. Like how she received a grant from the Louisiana Sea Grant Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, even though a majority of the projects they support are at larger universities. Or how she turned that funding into award-winning research on the effect of certain chemical compounds on fiddler crabs. That research got published in the renowned, peer-reviewed scientific journal, *Aquaculture*.

She was unusual because when Dr. Zou arrived to open up his lab, Felterman was always there waiting, not the other way around.

"She's on top of everything," he says. "Good things have happened to her, one after another."



Felteman holds the net during an alligator gar spawning project in 2014. She joined other Nicholls biology students and faculty at a Baton Rouge pond maintained by the LSU Ag Center to collect alligator gar to help repopulate habitats across the state.

SURPASSING THE BAR

Felteman would earn her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Nicholls. The next step was for her to earn her doctorate, right? That's what so many of her peers before and after her had done. Once again, something didn't feel right.

Riding in the passenger seat of her father's truck, Felteman had another gut feeling about what to do next: law school.

Felteman still remembers her reaction to her decision.

"What the heck are you thinking?" Felteman recalls her saying. She noted that her actual response included several words not suitable for publication.

"My first reaction to anything dealing with law school is, 'Are you out of your mind? They don't even speak English,'" says Dr. Ferrara, Jerry Ledet Endowed Professor of Environmental Biology. "In the long run, with her desire to make

was going to happen that semester in the Federal 5th District Court of Appeals. I threw up a little bit."

She represented the Charter Fisherman's Association as they tried to uphold a rule on red snapper fishing quotas. She would argue in federal court, an opportunity rarely afforded to many practicing attorneys, let alone a student.

Felteman hit the books, learning the administrative record "backward and forward."

"The day of the argument, you

FOR SHE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

It was Dr. Ferrara who had encouraged Felteman to apply for the Knauss Fellowship. The program matches high-performing graduate students with executive or legislative hosts in D.C. for a year. Dr. Ferrara was the first person Felteman called when she received the good news. What was her response? "Pandemonium," Felteman says.

Felteman was the first Nicholls

"Nicholls biology program is amazing, and where we're different is that we're here on the coast. Our professors throw us into the environment, we meet with stakeholders and we're teaching freshman who are probably first-generation college students from those communities."

"This is the question I get asked the most, 'Why law school?'" Felteman says. "With a Ph.D., you get one project, it's very specific, and that's the niche you're in. With a Ph.D., you process a lot of data. Then someone else takes that data and makes those big-picture decisions. I wanted to be the person who took the data and made those decisions. All I was missing was the legal background."

Her decision was well-received by almost everyone. Her advisor, professor and mentor, Dr. Allyse Ferrara, does not like lawyers.

a difference, she felt that becoming a lawyer would give her a greater chance to make a difference for Coastal Louisiana."

Felteman chose Tulane Law School because of its connection to the Environmental Law Clinic. The clinic gives students an opportunity to represent clients in state and federal environmental legal disputes. When scanning the list of cases to work on, one stood out.

"One of the cases was about red snappers, and I was like, 'Ooh, I like fish, I know fish,'" she says. "What I didn't realize was that the argument

walk into the room, and the justices come in, and it feels like the longest time for them to walk to the lectern," she says. "Then, they're like three feet in front of your face. I'm not barred, I'm just in law school. At the end, they welcomed me to appellate court and told me I did a great job."

A great job, indeed. The justices sided with Felteman 3-0.

"That may well be the only case I ever argue," she says. "I'm retiring undefeated. That was one of the craziest experiences of my life and the strangest learning opportunity I have ever had."

graduate to become a Knauss Fellow and only the second fellow in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Environment). She was their top choice among the 2018 Fellowship class.

"I was like, 'Mic drop,'" she says. "I called my dad instantly and told him I was going to work in the Pentagon."

The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Environment) has a broad reach. They dealt with the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. They also work to ensure that tour

ships, marines and sailors can train the right way.

Her job duties varied. She commented on new and proposed regulations. She reviewed environmental impact statements. She oversaw the implementation of environmental law. She worked on outreach to showcase the work the Navy does to improve the environment.

One day, Felterman might interact with the Secretary of Defense. The next, the Secretary of the Navy. Later in the week, it would be the Commandant of the Marine Corps or one of several other assorted generals, admirals and politicians.

She spent much of her time on the road, making trips to Hawaii, Guam, Sacramento and San Diego.

She had to pinch herself to make sure it wasn't a dream.

"The fellowship is amazing because it's for you to learn. Anything that's going on, they're like, 'Michelle, go do that,'" she says. "A lot of it is just being a sponge and absorbing everything. The program is mostly about learning what's happening and then taking it back to where you came from and using it there.

"You think Navy, you think the ocean, but a lot of our installations are on land," she adds. "Those installations are where all of the endangered species live, and you can't develop that property. You need forests so marines can run around and play, but woodpeckers like trees. We deal with it in really unique and interesting ways."

It was not all work and no play for Felterman. She has gone bowling at the White House. She took a private tour of the national aquarium. She even got Washington Nationals tickets from All-Star first baseman Ryan Zimmerman.

"Things I didn't even know were

on my bucket list," she says. "Bowling a strike at the White House bowling alley. I never knew I needed to do this, but here I am."

A self-labeled geek, Felterman also visited the Naval Observatory Library. She even touched a document signed by President Abraham Lincoln.

"How often do you get to see Abraham's real signature and then touch it?" she says. "I love Abe."

PRESERVING THE COAST

Since she left Nicholls, Felterman has been an unofficial ambassador for Cajun culture. She brought her classmates at Tulane to St. Mary Parish and taught them how to eat crawfish, cook gumbos and celebrate Mardi Gras. In D.C., she explained the difference between a coonass and a redneck to her coworkers and told them what it's like to live with alligators.

"She's a great ambassador because she is a part of this region," Dr. Ferrara says. "She knows the coast intimately. It's not like someone who drives down to Grand Isle and says, 'Oh, this is beautiful I want to save it.' She's been up to her neck in mud and slime and so she understands it. She can gauge what's the best way to introduce it to the people who don't like to get dirty and down in the marsh."

It's that knowledge of the science, paired with a passion for the culture, that separated Felterman from her fellow peers. Once you're accepted into the Knauss Fellowship Program, you submit a personal statement.

"I wrote about coastal land loss and not just the loss of the environment, but the loss of that culture and the loss of the communities and the history,"



Felterman on the day of her graduation from Tulane Law School.

she says. "It's what makes south Louisiana, south Louisiana."

Coastal Louisiana is facing a growing environmental crisis. It's important to have someone like Felterman on the policy-making side, Dr. LaFleur says.

"I have had the privilege of seeing her interact with what we may call our community elders, and it's those interactions where you feel in your belly that she's not just trying to save the coast, but she's interested in the people who live on the coast and protecting their homes," Dr. LaFleur says. "She saw there was a uniqueness with our culture, and she knows that those people are the heart and soul of the coast."

Now that she has completed her

Knauss Fellowship, Felterman says she hopes that more Colonels apply to the program.

"Nicholls biology program is amazing, and where we're different is that we're here on the coast. Our professors throw us into the environment. We meet with stakeholders and we're teaching freshman who are probably first-generation college students from those communities," she says.

As for her next move, Felterman's long-term goal is to come back to Louisiana and fight for the coast. When does she think that will be?

"I don't know. Maybe it's five years from now, maybe it's 10 years. I'll just do what I've always done and see what my gut says." ✨

Among the Trees



One of several Coulon Plantation Oaks, located across La. 308 from Tiger Drive Bridge in Thibodaux.



By Jessica Harvey Photos by Bill Guion

It could be their large size. Maybe it's their ability to live hundreds of years. Or, perhaps, it's their acorns. Whatever it is, Bill Guion (BA '75) has been drawn to oak trees.



Clockwise from upper left: The Blanchard Oak at St. Charles Borromeo Church; Bill Guion; the Edward Douglas White Oak at the E.D. White Historic Site; the Jim Bowie Oak at the Acadia Plantation; the Bayou Lafourche GEM Oak along La. 308; and the Boudreaux Oak, located along La. 1.



Guion has documented live oaks across the country for the last three decades. His work has appeared in magazines, journals, books and museums. He has published five books: *Heartwood, Meditations on Southern Oaks*, in 1998; *Heartwood, Further Meditations on Oaks* in 2009; *Across Golden Hills – Meditations on California Oaks* in 2013; *Laura Plantation – Images and Impressions* in 2017; and *Quercus Louisiana: The Splendid Live Oaks of Louisiana* in 2019.

“There is something about the oaks that I felt I needed to follow, whether it made sense, and whether it would support me or not,” Bill says. “I feel it’s my calling.”

His story begins at Nicholls State University. He had first received a degree in government but after a few years in the workforce, his passion changed and he returned to study journalism.

“My professors were extremely supportive and helpful,” he says. “They realized that I was serious about school, so they allowed me to split my course study between print and broadcast journalism because I wanted experience with both.”

As part of his curriculum, he took his first black-and-white photography course. A seed was planted that would shape his future.

He left school early to accept a job at a small, independent television station outside of Los Angeles. After consulting with his professors about the offer, they agreed that taking the job was too good an opportunity.

Two years passed and the TV station turned to Spanish-language programming. This prompted Bill’s return to Louisiana. He began to work in advertising and spent the next 15 years honing his skills in writing, researching, TV, radio, marketing, layout and design.

Over a three-decade career as a writer, he worked with major



companies like Hallmark and McGraw-Hill Education. He has written for banks, hospitals and investment firms. Yet all the while, he pursued a parallel path in photography, with a single subject-matter focus – Louisiana’s live oak trees.

“My writing and marketing experience has proved useful to my photography,” he says. “Being a writer and photographer allows me to see images and words together as a complete picture. This is especially helpful in telling the story of Louisiana’s live oaks and raising public awareness of their importance to our culture and our coastline.”

Live oaks are a coastal tree species with a normal life span of 300 to 600 years. They take root in the silt that washes up onto the coast to form cheniers, ridges of soil that form the solid ground. Over hundreds of years, this process helped build much of the Louisiana coast west of the Mississippi River. Cheniers are endangered by erosion and storms. Bill explains that several Louisiana arborists are currently working to replant oaks along the coast to help strengthen and rebuild the land.

After Hurricane Katrina, while working on a magazine article about the original 43 member trees of the Live Oak Society, he realized that eleven of these ancient oaks had been lost, through storms, urban development and degradation of the air, water and soil.

“Losing the old trees to nature is expected,” he says. “But the oaks have little protection against ‘progress.’ Even the oldest trees on the Live Oak Society registry have no legal protection.”

This has given Guion’s work a renewed sense of purpose.

He began using his photographs to build awareness of the importance of old live oaks to Louisiana’s culture and ecology. He hopes to document their stories while they’re still here.

He once wrote that oak trees are some of the greatest storytellers

because no two oak trees are the same. He now focuses on telling their stories through his “100 Oaks Project” blog.

“Oaks are a part of our culture. They’re part of what makes bayou country unique,” he says. “They are interwoven with people’s lives in the South. If you can tell the story of an old oak, if it has a name, if it’s part of local traditions and culture, then people will remember it and value it, and hopefully be more willing to save it if it’s threatened. I try to show that our oaks are alive and have personalities of their own.” ∞

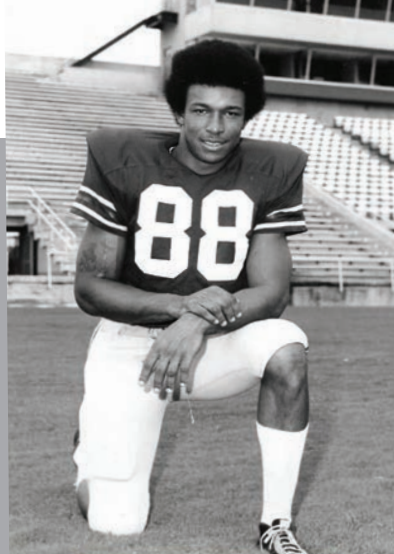


BREAKING BARRIERS

By Cain Madden



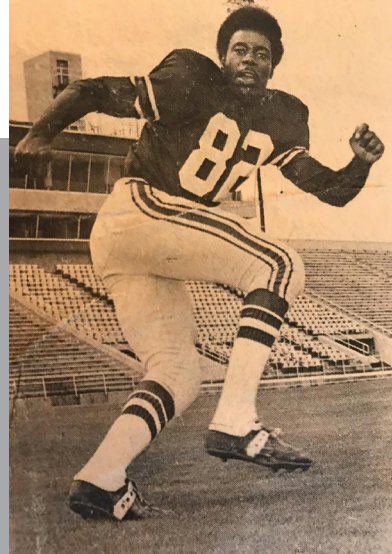
From left, Gerald Butler, Richard Berard, Ronald Joseph and Artia Hypolite. The four Colonels teammates recently took a friend's vacation that would inadvertently lead to the quartet being honored by the College Football Hall of Fame for integrating the Nicholls football team in the 1970s.



Gerald Butler



Artia Hypolite



Richard Berard



Ronald Joseph

The Story of Nicholls First Four Black Football Players

For years, four Nicholls teammates had been talking about a group trip. Richard Berard, Gerald Butler, Artia Hypolite and Ronald Joseph try to return to Thibodaux every football season and for campus functions. While attending a Colonels game is fun, they wanted to do more together.

A group trip became a reality in 2018 as they made it to Canton, Ohio, and the NFL Hall of Fame.

“The four of us had been talking for years about a guys’ trip,” Butler says. “While we were there, I was talking to my wife, and she said when we come through Atlanta, where we planned to spend a few days, we should visit the College Football Hall of Fame.”

Visiting the College Football Hall of Fame was an afterthought, but that chance visit turned into something special. A year later, the venue would recognize the quartet for integrating Nicholls football in 1972.

JOINING THE TEAM

Berard, Hypolite and Joseph were recruited out of Jeanerette, and Butler from Slidell.

The group were the only black players on the Colonels’ inaugural football team under then-head coach Gary Kinchen. It wasn’t easy, as many of their teammates had never played with African American athletes. And not everyone in Thibodaux was ready for an integrated football team.

“One of the conversations we have asked each other in the years since is, ‘If only one of us had been there without the support of the others, would that one have survived alone?’ I don’t believe we would have,” Hypolite says. “We just

had to pull together with each other and try to work through it.”

The team would build its bond with then defensive coordinator and future head coach Bill Clements. Clements was the first coach hired and recruited most of the players.

“We were never thinking about integration,” Clements says. “We recruited them like we did any other kids, and they turned out to be not only good players but good citizens.”

Clements says he has a lot of admiration for not only Berard, Butler, Hypolite and Joseph, but all the players from that foundation team. Kinchen’s coaching style was not player-friendly.

“The players who came in ‘71, ‘72 and ‘73, they lost a lot of teammates,” Clements says. “You’d wake up the next day and find out so and so left last night. I give them all the credit for hanging around and staying and helping us with the foundation. If it had just been a losing program from the beginning, I don’t know if Nicholls ever gets to where it is today.”

The dorm where they would eventually have a suite was still under construction when they arrived on campus. Butler and Joseph roomed together in Babbington Hall. Meanwhile, Berard and Hypolite each ended up with white roommates.

Berard recalls putting his things away in his room and meeting his two new roommates. One was friendly and approached Berard to get to know him. The other didn’t say a word or even smile.

“After the other guy and I finished talking, I said, ‘Man, I’m going to take a shower and relax,’” Berard says. “I went to get my toiletries and then the other guy realized his stuff was in the drawer next to mine. This guy got up, dumped all of his stuff back in his bag and then refused to get in the same

shower I had been in.”

Berard says he got together with Hypolite, Butler and Joseph, and they talked it out.

“The thing about it, I was 17 years old, and we had to mature pretty much overnight,” he says. “The four of us, we sat and talked and decided the best solution should be to just play ball and get our education. Never once did we cause any trouble.”

Though they had struggles adjusting, that first year was all it took to win over most teammates.

“We kept our focus and remembered we were all there for one reason, and that was to become champions,” Joseph says.

Hypolite adds, “That first year was the roughest, but we got to know our teammates. After that first year, I think we became close. And now we are even closer. I have gone to functions and ran into some guys, and we are hugging each other like family.”

CHALLENGES AROUND TOWN

Thibodaux was a different story, as some people had trouble accepting African Americans. Berard says he recalls going to the Foundry Night Club by himself when he had a separated shoulder. He had pins in his shoulder and one of his arms was in a sling, yet a white man still wanted to fight him. Berard recalls being thankful he didn’t do more damage to the shoulder.

But it wasn’t just the people. There was not a lot to do in Thibodaux, particularly if you were African American. Joseph says they made do by hopping in Butler’s 1964 Chevrolet Impala and driving to New Orleans or Baton Rouge. Other times they would cruise around.

“One time, we were rocking at the union,” Joseph says. “We put this sound system in that car and the

Richard Berard — DE

Richard Berard son of Naville and Ethel Berard is a native of Jeanerette, La. He is a 1972 graduate of Jeanerette Senior High School and had a successful high school career where he was a 4-year letterman in football. In his senior year he was selected team captain, most valuable defensive player, all district, and a member of the All Acadiana team.

In 1972 Richard was one of the first four African American athletes offered and accepted a four-year full scholarship to Nicholls State University located in Thibodaux, La. This was the beginning of the university's collegiate football program.

During his career at Nicholls in 1974 he was selected as Gulf South Conference Player of the week and UPI National Lineman of the week as the results of his performance in the game against Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, La., where he was credited with 18 individual tackles, 9 assists, and sacked the quarterback 3 times. At the end of the season he earned Second Team All-Conference honors and Nicholls most valuable defensive player.

In 1975 he sustained shoulder injuries and was awarded the Golden Sword award for contributions made on the field despite his injuries, honorable mention honors for the All Louisiana Team, Outstanding College Athlete of America, and member of Nicholls 1975 Gulf South Conference Championship team. Post-graduation he became a member of the Team of the Decade and ultimately selected to the Nicholls Athletics Hall of Fame.

The 6'2" 190 pounds defensive end collegiate career ended in 1976. Richard graduated from Nicholls with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and a minor in Economics. In 1977 he was employed by Chevron Services Company A Division of Chevron U.S.A. located in Houston, Texas, where he supervises accounting and currently resides with his family.

Gerald Butler — WR

Gerald Butler, the son of Norris and Ruth Butler from Slidell, La. was awarded a four-year scholarship in 1972, became one of the first four African-American football players at Nicholls State University. He played tight end his freshman year and won the Most Improved Player.

Gerald was moved to wide receiver his next three years and became a member of the Nicholls State Gulf South Championship team in 1975 and was selected the Most Valuable Offensive Player his senior year. He became the 1st player from Nicholls State to receive national recognition by being selected 1st Team Kodak All-American in 1976, by the American Football Coaches Association, as a wide receiver. He set receiving records in his era at Nicholls State and went on to represent his school to play in the North-South Shrine Senior Bowl Game in Detroit, Michigan and then on to the East-West Shrine Senior Bowl in Palo Alto, California, of which both games included players from Division 1 College teams. Gerald was awarded the Key to the City of New Orleans by then Mayor Moon Landrieu and awarded Slidell's Favorite Son in 1977.

Gerald was drafted by the Chicago Bears in the 1977, in the seventh round, the fifth player picked. He went on to play for the Kansas City Chiefs and the New York Jets. After his pro football career, He was selected on Nicholls State Team of the Decade as well as Nicholls Athletics Hall of Fame Induction of 2014. Gerald lives in Georgia and married to Cordella Butler and has spent his career after football working for various Information Technology companies and also worked as an Actor in his younger days.

Artia Hypolite — WR

From his humble beginnings of his cherished hometown of Jeanerette, LA, Artia Bernard Hypolite transitioned into manhood as he mastered life through the domain of football as an extraordinary athlete. Desiring not to financially burden his loving parents, Artia's dream of a postsecondary education became a reality by way of a four-year football scholarship to Nicholls State University.

In 1972 as one of the first four African American young men to play football for Nicholls State University, Artia's playbook held the engaging mysteries of his strength and determination as a Wide Receiver and budding young man. Determined to catch a football as the best pass-catching specialist, Artia strategically positioned himself and his team as key players in life, under the motto of the Golden Rule, treating others as one would desire to be treated. Artia and his football teammates of Nicholls State University desired to be champions.

The team's desire to become champions became a reality when with a Spirit of Brotherhood, Artia and his teammates led Nicholls State University to the victory of being named the 1975 Gulf South Conference Football Champions. It was then in Artia's heart, he knew that he and his teammates had become Champions.

Ronald Joseph — RB

A 1972 graduate of Jeanerette Senior High School located in Jeanerette Louisiana as their Most Valuable Back.

One of four pioneers to attend Nicholls State University joining the Athletic Department in their 1972 debut of joining the Gulf South Conference.

Nicholls State leading rusher in 1972-1973.

Selected as a Outstanding College Athlete of the United States of America in 1974.

A Member of the Nicholls State University, Gulf South Championship Team of 1975.



From left, Bulter's brother, Norris, Butler's sister, Joan, Butler's mother, Ruth, Butler, Butler's wife, Della, Butler's sister, Carmen, Berard's wife, Evette, Berard's grandson, Xavier, Berard's daughters, Megan and Page, Hypolite, Berard and Joseph.

"I have a lot of respect for Coach Clements, and even now you can call him up and he will answer."

Berard adds, "Thanks to coach Clements, who at one point was my positional coach and believed in me enough to offer me an unforgettable opportunity of a lifetime. We often tease coach by Hypolite, Butler and Joseph referring to me as his stepson."

Winning the championship in 1975 was a nice capstone to their time at Nicholls.

"We exceeded our expectations in winning the Gulf South Conference that fast," Butler says. "For a new program, winning on that level was something we never expected. It was the highlight for us, those of us from that decade who call ourselves 'Clements Colonels.' Some things in life, they always stay with you. This was one of those things."

LEGACY REMEMBERED

When they arrived at the College Football Hall of Fame last year for the first time, they ran into a

curator, Terry LeCount. The former Florida Gators quarterback and NFL wide receiver gave them a personal tour of the place.

While on the tour, Butler says LeCount seemed impressed, and wanted to learn more about their story at Nicholls. LeCount mentioned his idea for a Black History Month display.

The display idea would solidify when they attended a football game in 2018 when Clements was being honored. They met Athletic Director Matt Roan and told him about LeCount's Black History Month idea, and Roan was eager to play a part in making it happen.

In late February, the College Football Hall of Fame honored the quartet for integrating the Nicholls football team as part of Black History Month. Each of the four had a display with a picture of their time at Nicholls and a blurb about them on a national stage. The exhibition was shared with NFL legends such as Tony Dungy, Sam Cunningham and Ernie Davis.

"Well, it kind of put the cap on the journey that I went through from a very young age to manhood to

now," Hypolite says.

"For me especially," Joseph adds, "it was something that was never anticipated. It is an honor to be recognized and to be thought of in that particular way."

Berard, Butler, Hypolite and Joseph all say being honored was an overwhelming experience.

"This many years after my college football career, all I was expecting was aches and pains," Berard says with a laugh. "This was probably one of the greatest honors I have ever had."

Family being there boosted their emotions. Berard's wife, Yvette, and family came in from Houston. Joseph's wife, Mary, and family came from New Iberia. And Butler's wife, Cordella, and family came from Slidell. This included his 87-year-old mother, Ruth.

"We are all still trying to catch our breath," Butler says. "It's been that wonderful of an experience. We are extremely grateful for this once in a lifetime opportunity and to represent our alma mater, Nicholls State University, at the College Hall of Fame." ♦

"AFTER THAT FIRST YEAR, I THINK WE BECAME CLOSE. AND NOW WE ARE EVEN CLOSER. I HAVE GONE TO FUNCTIONS AND RAN INTO SOME GUYS, AND WE ARE HUGGING EACH OTHER LIKE FAMILY." - Artia Hypolite



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Introducing The Nicholls Annual Fund

What is the Nicholls Annual Fund?

Gifts to the Nicholls State University Annual Fund are used in essential areas across the campus to sustain and improve campus facilities, provide opportunities for faculty to further their skills, create stronger learning environments, enhance the student experience and meet unexpected needs.

Why are Annual Gifts important?

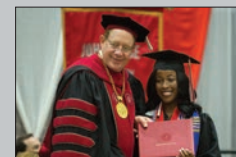
Declining funding from the state has resulted in a reduced operating budget. State funds and tuition dollars alone fail to meet the entire budget of the university. Annual gifts augment that money to help maintain existing programs and enhance them by allowing for the planning and implementation of potential new programs.

Red and Gray



\$1,000 to \$2,499 Will receive all benefits of being a member of the Nicholls Foundation.

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\$2,500 to \$4,999 Same as Red and Gray, plus invited to Dr. Clune's "State of Nicholls" address and a reception that follows.

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\$5,000 to \$9,999 Same as President's Circle, plus invited to a special dinner with Dr. Clune.

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The Red Zone

Barker Hall Renovation: A Game-Changer



At more than \$2.5 million dollars this donation tops the charts and showcases the trust the Bayou Region community has in the direction of Nicholls State University Athletics. The money will be used to fund the \$6.5 million expansion and renovation of Barker Hall and places Nicholls at the forefront of facilities in the Southland Conference.

More than Football

It's easy to see a facility that expands into the South Endzone of Guidry Stadium and think it is only a football donation. But all 17 Nicholls Athletics programs will benefit from the renovations. Once construction is complete, offices such as track and field, tennis and softball that are located across campus, will be housed under one roof.

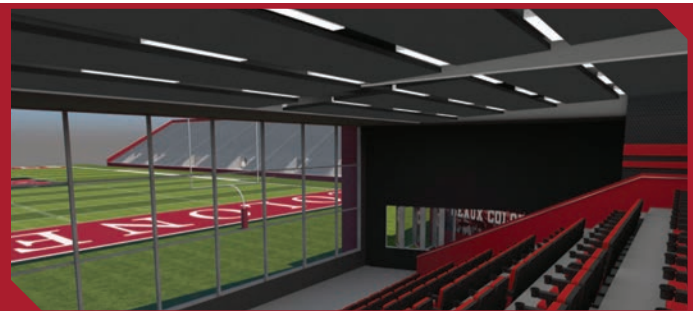


State of the Art

In the expanded Barker Hall, the football program will move into a football operations center, which will include a new locker room, players' lounge, team meeting room with stadium-style seating, training room, equipment room, coaches' and staff offices, position and group meeting rooms, a catering kitchen and a showcase lobby. The team room will convert to gameday club seating and produce revenue for all 17 programs.

Coming to a Guidry Near You

Thibodaux-based architectural group Weimer Gros Flores will oversee the project. The group has worked on notable projects around the Bayou Region and on the Nicholls campus. Construction on the renovation and expansion will begin soon and is expected to be completed ahead of the 2020 football season. Imagine watching the Colonels host a second-round playoff game from inside the new facility.



But Wait There's More

Upon completion of this phase of renovations and construction, Nicholls Athletics will jump into the design phase for a new indoor practice facility. The indoor practice facility will benefit all 17 athletic programs, and will also tie into the newly renovated Chabert Hall, the strength and conditioning and nutrition center of Colonel Athletics.

Energy to Keep Running



The life of a small university track and field coach can be hectic. One must juggle alumni relations, recruiting, budgeting and coaching itself, all while keeping an eye on the program's upward trajectory.

Coach Stefanie Slekis came to Nicholls two years ago. Since she arrived, the track and field and cross-country programs have started to rise.

On the track side, new programs were added, including men's track and field for the first time in over a decade. For cross-country, Nicholls hosted its first home meet in over a decade and will host the Southland Conference Championship in 2021.

"It's really a dream come true," Slekis says about being at Nicholls. "I knew I wanted to be a head track and field coach at one point. I think knowing I could build something from the ground up was a plus because that might scare a lot of people. But I see it more as a challenge."

An average day for Slekis, at least in the fall, starts before most people wake up, at 5:30 a.m. You can find her at the office doing some administrative work. She then attends cross-country practice at 6 a.m. Once back on campus, duties include budget planning and recruiting. In the afternoon, she's off to track and field practice.

If possible, Slekis tries to get in an afternoon run before picking up her daughter Polly Jean from Little Colonels Academy. Sometimes she'll take her on a stroller run. She'll then attend a Nicholls athletic event in the evening, such as soccer, basketball or volleyball.

Sleakis says running is important because she can connect with alumni at local road races in the greater New Orleans area. They are also important for her personal goals. In fact, with a time of 2:42:19 at Grandma's Marathon at Duluth, Minn., in June, Sleakis recently qualified for the 2020 U.S. Olympic Trials in Atlanta.

Attending games also helps her build relationships with the community and alumni from track and other sports. Building relationships is important for fundraising. It also helps build momentum and energy for the program as more people get involved. She has started the Colonel 5K fundraiser in the spring. The program now also sports a crawfish boil in the spring.

Coaching the whole student is important to her. She recruits students who will also achieve in the classroom. That's not a nine-to-five job.

"So they might text me at all hours of a day. When it goes off during bed hours, my husband will look at me like, 'Is that an emergency?'" Slekis says with a laugh. "You want to set up boundaries, but it is also good that they feel like they can call you if it is an emergency."

In between all that, you might also catch Slekis at the Nicholls Farm keeping the track mowed.

"I wear a lot of different hats," she says. "I think that's what I like the most about being at a smaller school, is that you get so much stuff you get to do."

Building a program doesn't stress Slekis out too much. It's something she's been a part of since running cross-country for a new high school in northern Virginia. In college, she chose Syracuse, which at the time was trying to get its cross-country program back on the national stage. Before coming to Nicholls, she coached the men's and women's cross-country teams at the University of North Texas. She led the men's program to win the Conference USA championship in 2014.

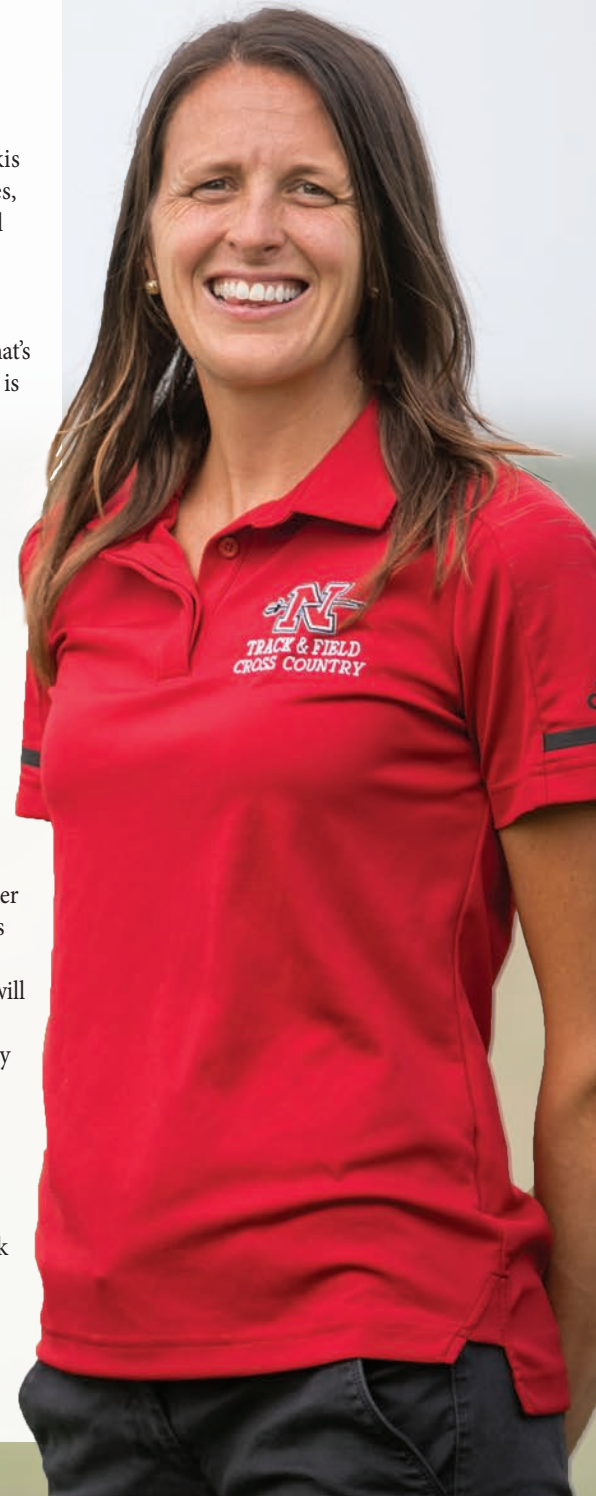
Nicholls Athletics Director Matt Roan credits the strides the track program has made to Slekis' energy and experience.

"Coach Sleakis has done a phenomenal job since her very first day at Nicholls," says Roan. "She prioritizes every part of the student-athlete experience and has transformed our program in two years. The results will come because of the foundation she's establishing."

Sleakis says she has no plans to slow down and only intends to see the program rise from here. Though she knows it will be a lot of work.

"Obviously, the end result is I want to win a championship like I came here thinking I could realistically do," she says. "As a part of that, we want to have every student-athlete graduate and look back fondly on their time as a student-athlete here."

"And if we win, I want to make sure the resources are in place that we can continue winning, so we can make it a tradition." — Cain Madden





Becoming DJ Rhett



As the video begins, a late 30s white man with his brown hair slicked back looks into the camera as the first notes of “We Are the World” ring out. Without warning, his face changes. He’s now Lionel Ritchie, singing the opening lyrics. Then he is Stevie Wonder and Paul Simon. Before the song is over, he has transformed into the rest of the celebrities who came together and sang the song, as well as few more recent musicians.

That comical use of face swap was DJ Rhett’s viral introduction to the world. In south Louisiana, Rhett Lecompte (BS ‘00) was already known for his ability to make people laugh.

A self-described homebody, the Houma native only considered going to Nicholls State University. His then-girlfriend was there studying nursing, and he knew he would get a first-rate education without straying too far from the bayou.

“It’s still home to me,” he says. “There’s something about this area, there’s something about the coast that wants me to stay here.”

Fluent in business analytics and tomfoolery, Lecompte can transition from discussing quantitative business statistics in a subtle Cajun accent to how he came up with his popular parody of *Dumb and Dumber* with a dialect straight out da baya. That doesn’t mean he’s two different people. Whether he’s Rhett Lecompte or DJ Rhett, he’s the same laid-back guy looking to make people smile.

“I’m very comfortable in my skin,” he says.

That’s been true from a young age. The oldest of

three brothers and the only not interested in sports, Lecompte was laser-focused on creating quality videos. His on-camera persona was first created around the age of 9 years old with a Sony video camera recording prank phone calls at 2 a.m.

“It was the Rhett Lecompte Prank Call Show, and I would say, ‘Let’s go to the winning number,’ and interview a random number from the phone book,” he says. “I showed my mom and dad, and they told me I was crazy but funny.”

Now, he and his friends Josh Mount and Aaron Goforth – coworkers at Pipeline Construction and Management – come up with ideas for content. Nothing is safe. The group has parodied movies ranging from *Forrest Gump* to *The Sandlot* – see how many Vanderbilt Catholic and E.D. White students and alumni don’t know the phrase “Up the Baya Redbird.”

Lecompte says the videos resonate with people because they reenact everyday situations. For example, take their parody of a scene from *The Notebook* where Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams are arguing. Lecompte has dubbed over a dispute he has with his wife, one where he wants to go to the Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo. Another is the courtroom scene from *A Few Good Men*. Instead of a trial, the characters are yelling about potato salad.

“That’s what sets our comedy apart from everybody else’s. We take relatable stuff and make it funny,” he says. “When you take a real situation and put it on top of something they know that’s not what they’re saying, it just meshes well together, and it’s so much fun to make.”

South Louisiana is home, and it’s where he draws his inspiration. Being Cajun is a family tradition. His grandfather was a trawler and commercial fisherman, and he used to take Lecompte with him

out on the boat for 14 days at a time.

Lecompte hopes his videos remove the “Water Boy” stereotypes and increase interest in his home state. He notes that viewers have reached out to him after a video has gone viral to ask him about whatever Cajun French word he used.

“The people in this region are some of the most hospitable people ever. We like to party, we like to have a good time, and I want to portray that,” he says. “I don’t want to be dubbed as that Cajun guy. I want to be known as someone who loves Louisiana, who loves where he’s from.”

The father of three daughters says he plans to continue producing videos as long as he’s having fun and can help promote the Pelican State.

“I want this area to grow. I want people to come visit, not just here but all Louisiana,” he says. “If it was up to me, I’d vacation here all the time. Lucky for me, I get to live here and raise my family here.”

Lecompte wants to see the world a happier place.

“I want people to share ideas. I want people to be creative. I want to make people laugh and feel good. I like to think I’ve accomplished that.”

– Jacob Batte, Illustration by Lydia Sayes



Pushing Your Limits

Growing up, Ellen McCord (BA '03) found herself subjected to a variety of cultures across the country because of her father's work in the Coast Guard. But one stood out, south Louisiana.

She had a personal connection to the area, as her mother was a native of the Pelican State. Much to her daughter's delight, she would always share her stories of what it was like to grow up Cajun.

"My mother was an Arabie, which is about as Cajun as I think it gets," Ellen says.

She says that as she became older, she discovered what a "gem Louisiana is across the board."

That love of Cajun culture shows throughout her paintings. She has painted pelicans, red snapper, daisies, fishing camps and the bayous themselves.

After graduating from high school, Ellen wanted to go to college but was unsure of what career path she wanted to follow.

She applied to Nicholls State University for its location and homey qualities. She took an art class as an elective, and that whim would result in both her major and future changing.

"My senior exhibit was my favorite memory during my time at Nicholls. I remember feeling like 'Wow, people actually enjoy what I create. I'm actually good at this,'" she says. "It was even sweeter because my daughter was a toddler at the time, and I can still picture her running around the room."

Her professors noted her talent and passion for her craft.

"Denis Sipiorski, a professor on campus at the time, truly helped me to develop the style I paint in today," she says. "He encouraged me to embrace the folk-art style instead of running from it."

That style is paper pulp painting, and it's a process that uses cotton linters – popular fibers used in papermaking and paper casting.

The artist first beats the cotton linters to a pulp and paints them on a base sheet of paper using squeeze bottles. Then, the artist vacuums the water out of the paper and sets it out to dry.

McCord loves the texture of the process and how it gives her paintings a three-dimensional appearance.

After earning her degree, Ellen opened an art center with her sister-in-law but soon realized that she wanted to create more freelance art. She now takes commissions from across the state and sells



Nicholls alumna Ellen McCord poses with an original painting. She is known locally for her use of the unique paper pulp style.

pieces in local stores. She identifies the art she paints in now as the "Dr. Seuss side of LA."

McCord says she loves interacting with other students and shares a piece of wisdom she has picked up over the years.

"You can only go as far as you believe in yourself. Don't be afraid to push your limits. Keep striving because you will always learn more through your failures. Never give up if it does not come right away. Stand strong and preserve." – *Jasmine Adams*

SAVING THE WORLD AT HOME

It had only been a few months since he had returned from Bangladesh. It was his second goodwill trip overseas by age 30, yet Jonathan Foret was already thinking about where and when he would go next.

The former English teacher in Houma and Brooklyn, New York, had found a purpose working with underdeveloped countries. But before he could form a plan, he received a challenge from a friend.

“Why are you going all over the world to fix other people’s problems when we have so many problems in our own community that need addressing?” he recalls being asked. “Why don’t you take your energy and focus it here?”

He took the suggestion to heart. What he found disturbed him. The generation after his lacked a strong connection to the very coast they lived near.

“They had never gone crabbing. They didn’t know that crabs molt to grow and that a soft shell crab is not a different species,” he says. “It made me feel good that they can come to our summer camp and become aware of those things.”

Now, Foret is the executive director of the South Louisiana Wetlands Discovery Center. There, he attempts to spread education about Coastal Louisiana. He also organizes the annual award-winning Rougarou Festival every fall.

“We may very well be the last generation to really experience this area in its environmental heyday,” Foret says. “I think in the generations coming up, it’s going to be a lot different.”

Coastal Louisiana means something more to Foret. The Chauvin native grew up walking the woods with his dad near their house. He cleaned thistles in the spring. He learned to identify the right willow trees to pick oyster mushrooms. He caught buckets of shrimp behind the levee to bring home to boil for supper.

He describes his childhood as the Cajun version of movies like “The Goonies” or “Stand By Me.” Except, instead of running from the mob, they caught snakes in the culvert. Instead of looking for a dead body, they tied dead flies to a string to catch mosquito hawks.

“My favorite childhood memory was playing in the ditch near our house,” Foret says. “I remember being about six or seven years old, and I got a minnow trap for either Christmas or my birthday. It was the best present I ever received. I would use slices of bread for bait and I would catch all kinds of things in the ditch.”

A typical Cajun family, Foret’s relatives all lived nearby. His maternal grandparents lived at the front of the street and paternal grandparents at the back. Aunts, uncles and cousins sprinkled throughout the neighborhood.

“When somebody cooked, you didn’t need an invitation,” he says. “You would just eat at whoever’s house. Then somebody else would cook and you would eat at their house. It was a lot of fun.”

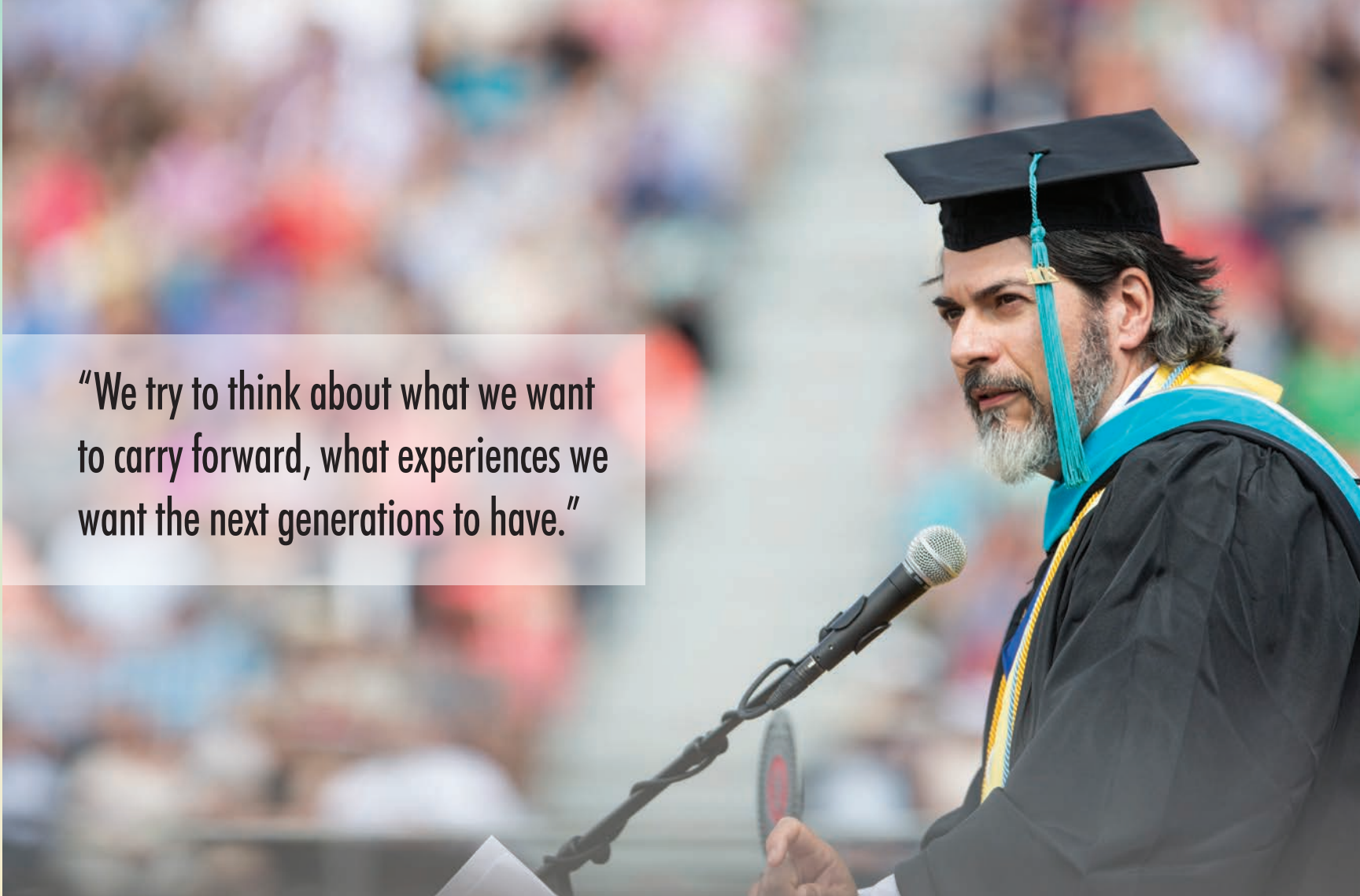
That experience growing up, he says, is why it is so important to him to push for coastal education in the community.

“We’re not about locking in one culture and saying this is how we’ve done this and this is how it will always be done,” he says. “We try to think about what we want to carry forward, what experiences we want the next generations to have.”

Foret introduces concepts tied to coastal land loss in the SLWDC summer camps. He talks about subsidence, native and invasive species, hurricanes and how we can take care of our land.

Telling second and third graders that their land is sinking from



A man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a black graduation cap with a blue tassel and a black graduation gown with a blue and yellow stole, is speaking at a podium. He is looking slightly to his left. A microphone is in front of him. The background is a blurred crowd of people.

“We try to think about what we want to carry forward, what experiences we want the next generations to have.”

On the left, Foret holds his pet nutria, Beignet. He uses him as an example of an invasive species during his summer camps. Above, Foret delivers the Spring 2017 Commencement keynote address.

underneath their feet can seem akin to saying the sky is falling.

“I tell them not to freak out, but I don’t want our kids to be blindsided by this because we weren’t able to prepare ourselves,” Foret says. “We’re not teaching the kids to stay. We’re not teaching the kids to leave. But we’re giving them the information where they can make the best choices for what they want to do for themselves and their families in the future.”

A highlight for the young campers is meeting Foret’s pet nutria, Beignet.

The duo are local celebrities, having appeared together at events, in photoshoots and on magazine covers. He laughs at the idea that he is a celebrity. Still, his friends often approach him with the November 2017 cover of Point of Vue magazine asking for an autograph.

At 3 years old, Beignet is a unique, pampered nutria. The oft-hunted invasive species are known for their orange teeth, the damage they cause the environment and bounty for their tails. They rarely befriend chickens, enjoy air-conditioning or receive regular vet visits. But they aren’t Beignet.

“He loves to get his belly rubbed,” Foret says. “He reaches for me, asking me to pick him up and hold him, you know. He’s such a sweetheart. He’s so spoiled.”

Those connections and experiences are a part of Foret. He loves his community and they love him back. It was a driving factor in why he

wanted to create the Rougarou Festival.

It’s an homage to the festivals he went to as a kid in Chauvin, which brought people and cultures together. He melded that concept with a Halloween parade he helped start with the South Louisiana Center for the Arts.

Every vendor, be it craft or food, has some tie to the Cajun culture. It would be easier, Foret says, to have someone like Olive Garden run a booth. Yet, that would distract from the purpose of the festival.

“It would be easier, it would be less work, but the benefits to our organization and to our community wouldn’t be as great,” he says. “This is a fun, community-building festival.”

Foret often draws jovial comparisons to the rougarou with his long, silver-streaked black hair and beard. When asked about his favorite stories of the mythical Cajun werewolf, he mentions the change in the lore surrounding the creature.

“When I was a kid, it was, ‘Be good, or the Rougarou was going to get you,’ but now we sort of portray him as a protector of the swamp,” Foret says.

It seems Foret and the Rougarou have found a coastal ally in one another. — Jacob Batte

1970 Mr. Nicholls Honored Again

Leslie Clement (BA '70) is no stranger to success at Nicholls State University.

As a student, he was Student Government Association president and Mr. Nicholls. Now an alumnus, he is a member of the Nicholls Hall of Fame and the 2019 recipient of the James Lynn Powell Outstanding Alumni Award.

The award is the highest recognition available to a Nicholls graduate.

Receiving the honor has re-energized his support for the university, Clement says.

"I don't see this award as the end but rather the continuation of my future efforts to do what I can to support Nicholls," he says.

Years of state budget cuts have forced universities to increase the cost of attendance.

Supporting Nicholls, Clement says, means helping the students and families affected by those cuts.

"Supporting Nicholls would mean to defray expenses that some students might not otherwise be able to afford," he says.

Since he graduated from Nicholls, he has never strayed too far from campus. He is a season ticket holder for several sports and served on the Colonel Athletic Association Board. He has also served on the Alumni Federation Board of Directors and is a member of the Nicholls Foundation.

"Colonel Pride means that I'm proud to have received my bachelor's degree from Nicholls State University," he says. "It also means the community should realize the importance of supporting Nicholls, and it's a way to instill that into the local community."

It's easy to stay involved, Clement says, when you trust the direction of the university. He points to the energy brought to campus by president Dr. Jay Clune and to the athletic program by athletic director Matt Roan.

"I'm very pleased we're moving in the right direction, and I'm confident we will continue to do so," he says.



Clement, who has operated his own law office since 1978, says his parents instilled in him a work ethic that has guided his life to this day.

"There are many people who are as deserving, if not more deserving of this award

than I am," he says. "I want to encourage everyone to do all that you can to support Nicholls State University. I'm fortunate to have had a good education and good teachers. By supporting Nicholls, you can help fill that same role in another student's life." — Jacob Batte

Colonel Notes

★ denotes Alumni Federation member

1980s

★ **Mark Plaisance** (AS '82, BS '83) is stepping down from his position as Lafourche Parish's chief public defender to go back to practicing law full-time. He will also be teaching law and criminal justice classes at Nicholls in the fall.

★ **Jerry Ledet** (BS '83), CEO and President of Synergy Bank, was named The Houma Courier's Most Useful Citizen and received the Chamber's Star Award at the Houma-Terrebonne Chamber of Commerce's 90th Annual Banquet.

1990s

★ **Dr. Tammy Cheramie** (BA '90, MEd '93, ELA +30 '12) is a 7th grade ELA teacher at Houma Junior High for the second year. She teaches English and writing to students and works to enhance and improve their reading and writing skills needed for high school and beyond. She is also currently working on her MLIS at Louisiana State University.

Eric Held (BGS '93) was recently named the interim director of the Louisiana High School Coaches Association.

John Michael Boquet (AS '98, BS '99) was named health, safety and environment manager for Edison Chouest Offshore's affiliate, C-Innovation, in Mandeville, Louisiana.

2000s

Cory Haik (BA '00) is Vice Media's new chief digital officer.

Amy Ponvelle Hebert (BGS '00, MED '08) and her husband Lawrence Hebert announce the birth of their son, Paul Joseph Hebert, on August 23, 2018. Amy is the director of Student Success and Retention at Nicholls.

Chef Justin Emil (BS '01) is opening a pop-up Cajun and creole restaurant, Roux 32, in his home state of Minnesota.

Alexis Braud (BA '08) is the artist for the 2019 Books Along the Teche Literary Festival's annual "Symphony Sunday In the Park" in Iberia Parish.

Neili Loupe (BS '08) earned her PhD in chemistry from Northwestern University in Boston. She is a scientist at Engineering Research and Consulting in Huntsville, Alabama.

Danos Children Continue Family Legacy



From left, Dr. Jay Clune, Rene David, Alyce Danos and Paula Rome.

Growing up, a joke among the four children of Mary and Al Danos is that Nicholls State University was the secret fifth child.

That made it special when the Nicholls Alumni Federation awarded the Mary and Al Danos Foundation with the Corporate Mark of Honor. They received the award during the annual Alumni Awards for Excellence reception.

"This award really is hitting home. And it is really important to us because it shows the efforts and the mission that our parents set forth for us. We are continuing their love of Nicholls," says Rene Danos David. "So recognizing us just shows us that we are continuing their work with this wonderful university."

Mary and Al Danos were longtime supporters of the arts at Nicholls. The foundation, operated by their children, has continued that legacy. It has given more than \$1 million to support the Mary and Al Danos

Theater in Talbot Hall and to the success of music and theater programs on campus. It's that support that led Nicholls President Dr. Jay Clune to select them to receive the award.

David thought of Nicholls being another Danos child when considering her father's love of the theater.

"You know how when you love your children, you have a lot of pride, you are proud of them and you like to show them off," David says. "Well, daddy did that with Nicholls. He really did that with this theater. He was really, really proud of this theater. When I come to one of the performances, of Oh Lá Lá or Monster Piano, it is like he is here."

The Danos children are thankful to Dr. Clune and the Alumni Federation for recognizing them with the award, and to the donors who contributed to the theater.

"With so many deserving entities in the region, it is humbling to receive the award among the field of competition," says Marcel Danos (BS '95, MBA '02). — *Cain Madden*

Swanner Receives Peltier Award



From left, Dr. Jay Clune, Neal Swanner and Paula Rome.

Wearing a suit coat over a Nicholls athletic polo with a tie in his pocket, Neal Swanner joked he'd met the letter of the law for the suit and tie affair. The philanthropist was at the annual Alumni Awards for Excellence reception to receive the Harvey Peltier Award.

Swanner is the owner and operator of Bubba's II Po-boys and Seafood, and he runs the Swanner Foundation, which honors the memory of his brother.

He has long supported Nicholls State University. He set up a scholarship in his brother's name and the Nicholls softball team plays on Swanner field.

The Harvey Peltier Award honors an outstanding supporter of the university. It is the highest honor a non-graduate can receive from Nicholls.

"Well, the Harvey Peltier award, it is an honor to get it because it is presented through

the Alumni Federation. More importantly, Harvey Peltier is a prominent family member from the city of Thibodaux. He meant a great deal to the city and Nicholls," Swanner says. "His grandson Drew Peltier is in the same fraternity I am in, and I am his big brother. Also, my brother Norman received it in 1997,

so it has deep roots. I appreciate the award."

Nicholls is important to the region because of the number of people who come to Thibodaux, whether it be to attend school, a ballgame, another event or for

employment, Swanner says.

"Thibodaux would not be as big or great as it is this day other than the fact of Nicholls being here for over 70 years, which is tremendous," he says. "We are blessed our business has been good enough to give back to the community. We are more than happy to do it for Nicholls and the community."

— Cain Madden

“Thibodaux would not be as big or great as it is this day other than the fact of Nicholls being here for over 70 years, which is tremendous.”

Jacob Loupe (BS '09) has a new job as a senior scientist for HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology.

2010s

Catherine Blanchard Jeanice (MBA '10) was recently promoted to chief financial officer of NVI, LLC.

Amanda Johnson Wildblood (BS '10) has been named sous chef of the Cypress

Bayou Casino Hotel in Charenton. She is originally from Basile, Louisiana.

Jeremy Breaux (BFA '11) has been named the director of the Houma Bayou Regional Arts Council.

Misty Portier Guidry (AGS '11) was promoted to mortgage loan originator at Synergy Bank.

★ **Megan Warren** (MA '11) is now the

chief compliance officer for Magnolia Family Services in Thibodaux.

Sarah Pitts Arceneaux (BGS '12) is the new director of economic development and grants for the City of Thibodaux. Her responsibilities include researching and applying for grant opportunities to help improve the community, staying up to date with future and current projects that are awarded

funding, composing press releases to keep citizens informed of road work, inclement weather, etc., and developing the city's monthly newsletter.

Cody LeBlanc (BS '14, MS '17) married Madeline Harris LeBlanc on May 17, 2019. Cody is a math teacher at Catholic High School in Pointe Coupee, Louisiana.

Katie LeBoeuf Giroir (BA '14, MAT '16) and her husband

Jonah Giroir (BA '14, MBA '16) announce the birth of their daughter, Emilia Frances Giroir, on May 11, 2019. Katie is a fifth grade teacher at St. Francis De Sales School in Houma. Jonah is a credit analyst at Pedestal Bank.

Kimberly Bartlett Wright (BA '15), of Golden Meadow, received the Shining Star Award from the Kilgore Chamber of Commerce for her

volunteerism with the Boys & Girls Club, SAFFE Day and the Chamber of Commerce. She is a real estate agent for Julie Woods & Associates.

Mitchell Folsie (BS '17) is the configuration control manager at Gulf Island Fabrication-Marine Division.

Caroline Marcello (BA '17), was named KLFY's newest Passe Partout morning anchor.

An Impact Not Forgotten

In Memoriam

FACULTY/STAFF

Dr. Harrell Hale Carpenter, on Sunday, June 9, 2019, was a native of Crockett, Texas, and a resident of Thibodaux. He served in the Navy and then taught in Texas and Venezuela before becoming a professor of education and a Distinguished Service Professor at Nicholls State University for over 31 years.

Carolyn "Gramster" L. Delahoussaye, age 67, on Saturday, March 30, 2019, was a Raceland native and resident. She was an office manager in the Office of Records and Registration at Nicholls State University.

ALUMNI

★ **Augustus "Hunter" Reynaud** (BA '60), age 79, on Saturday, February 23, 2019, was a New Orleans native and Houma resident. Hunter was an Associate Professor of English at Nicholls State University for 23 years until his retirement in 1986.

William A. "Bill" Oliver (Honorary Alumnus '03), age, was a Lake Charles native and Baton Rouge resident. William worked for AT&T/Bell South for almost 37 years, with more than eight years as president in Louisiana. In 2004, he was also king of Washington Mardi Gras. He retired and opened William A. Oliver Enterprises LLC, in 2009, which provides businesses with consulting and management services.

Mandy Landry Robinson (BS '09), age 33, on Saturday, May 25, 2019, was a native and resident of Thibodaux. She was a teacher at St. Charles Elementary School and recently named their 2017-18 Teacher of the Year.

Khristian Prestenbach Rahm (BS '16), age 28, on Monday, May 20, 2019, was a native of Houma and a Thibodaux resident.



Andrea "Andie" Bollinger-Giardina didn't graduate from Nicholls State University. But the entire campus has felt her presence.

She passed away in July 2019 at 68 years old, but the previous spring cemented her legacy at Nicholls.

First, the university named the Sister Suites in the Student Union after she and her sister, Charlotte. Then, she received the 2019 Honorary Alumni Award from the Nicholls Alumni Federation.

"I'm so touched Andie was chosen to be named Honorary Alumni," her sister Charlotte said during the award ceremony. Andie was ill and couldn't attend. "I can't think of anyone who deserves it more than she does. When I heard about it, I thought this is exactly the right time."

Andie was kind, generous, compassionate and funny, Charlotte says. She could help people one-on-one or work well in a group. Like her older siblings, Andie loved Nicholls.

"Her involvement with Nicholls is a long one. I think back to the year 2000. We were trying to identify a program at Nicholls that needed the most financial help, and she found that it was women's athletics," Charlotte says. "Andie really took that on and she always supported those teams so much and tried to get people to join in. It's been such a big success for all of us and to see how much they've grown over the last two decades, I know she was really proud of that."

Charlotte told the audience at the ceremony how excited her sister was when Dr. Clune called and told them about the Sister Suites.

"Andie and I, we were speechless. I thought it was the sweetest thing," she says. "She was so thrilled."

Her passion for Nicholls touched all corners of the campus. She was an early supporter of the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute. Her support helped send students across the globe.

"I can't think of anybody more deserving than Mrs. Andie Bollinger-Giardina for the Honorary Alumni Award," says Chef J.P. Daigle, culinary instructor. "She's a champion of Nicholls. She was constantly eating in our dining room and supporting our kids. She has helped send so many of our students to Lyon, France every year for the Institut Paul Bocuse."

She was also a member of the Mary and Al Danos Theater Design and Funding Committee. Her donations and fundraising aided renovations to and maintenance for the theater. Of the many projects she supported, Charlotte says the theater was her favorite.

"Andie is not only a blessing to the university but a blessing to our family as well," says Rene Danos David. "She was one of our mom's dearest friends. She knew our mom pretty well inside and out. She will always be special and near and dear to our heart because she went above and beyond what we needed to do to help get this theater the way it is today." — *Jacob Batte*

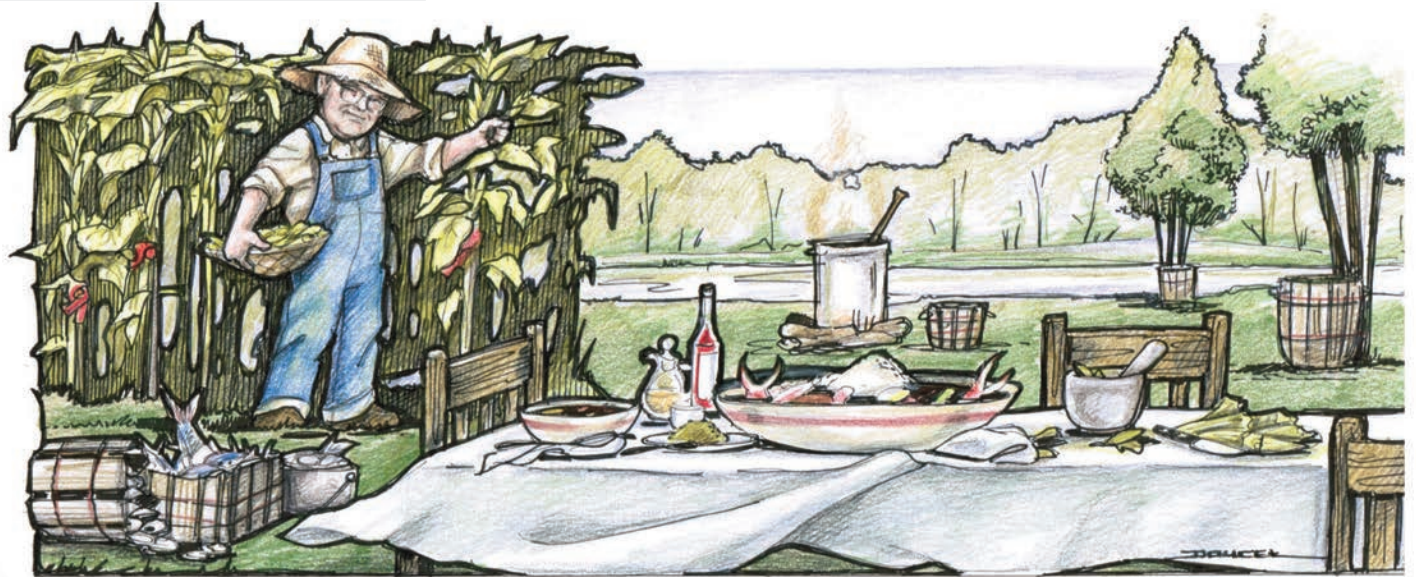


Illustration by Sharon Doucet (BA '78)

Number 147

Lafcadio Hearn, nineteenth century writer on the coast and culture of Louisiana, as well as the namesake of the annual award of our culinary institute here at Nicholls, translated hundreds of Creole proverbs and published them in 1885 as the collection titled *Gombo Zhebes*. Proverb Number 147 reads “Jardin loin, gumbo gaté,” which translates literally as “When the garden is far away, the gumbo is spoiled.”

I remember Number 147 each time I remember my grandpa’s gumbos from my childhood. Not because her gumbos were spoiled. Just the opposite, in fact. I remember them because her garden was close by.

On holidays like Easter and Christmas, we’d gather with the old folks at their old home and eat from the old recipes. My grandpa’s holiday gumbo was literally a marine biology lesson. It was a dark and thick sea of sacrificed aquatic animals. Trawling from that lake with a soup spoon uncovered bodies of Gulf shrimp, curled tightly as if tetanus had wrenched them taut and burst away their shells. The shrimp bobbed around shiny, buoyant medallions of oyster with their rippled fringes bumping into shells of bigorneaux, turtle eggs and yellowy crumbles of fish egg sacs from a formerly expectant speckled trout. And each grandchild was served one half-body of a once-blue crab, with its five remaining appendages pointing upward to crustacean heaven in some belated act of penance for pincer misbehavior.

It seems that my grandpa used everything my grandpa could catch with a trawl net, trotline and oyster tongs from his vantage down the bayou near the coast. And that bumping bigorneaux gumbo was only my grandpa’s holiday roux gumbo. She cooked a diversity okra gumbos and filé gumbos as well that were biology lessons unto themselves. In a real way, the variety of her gumbos represent not just biology lessons but history lessons as well.

The land of southeastern Louisiana bayous was woody wilderness as my grandpa’s forebears, the Acadians, arrived here in 1785 as frontier families and the first immigrants of number. With each generation needing new land, they settled successively farther and farther down the bayous until reaching the coast by the middle of the nineteenth century. Along the way and over time, they learned gumbo-making. Chance meetings with Native Americans in the headlands may have taught them to dry and pound leaves from sassafras trees to make filé. Trade with Creoles from New Orleans traveling along the Old Spanish Trail as it crossed the bayous may have shown them okra seeds and techniques to grow them. When bayouside towns and their grocers arose, wheat flour became available, and they learned to fry it in the lard of wild animals to make roux. And when they reached the wetlands and coast, they found shrimp and oysters and

bigorneaux and turtles and trout and crabs. As generations of settlers made their way from the headlands down the coast, they picked up and absorbed bits and pieces of the natural world that they folded into their culture and gumbos, using the fruits of whichever garden was not far away.

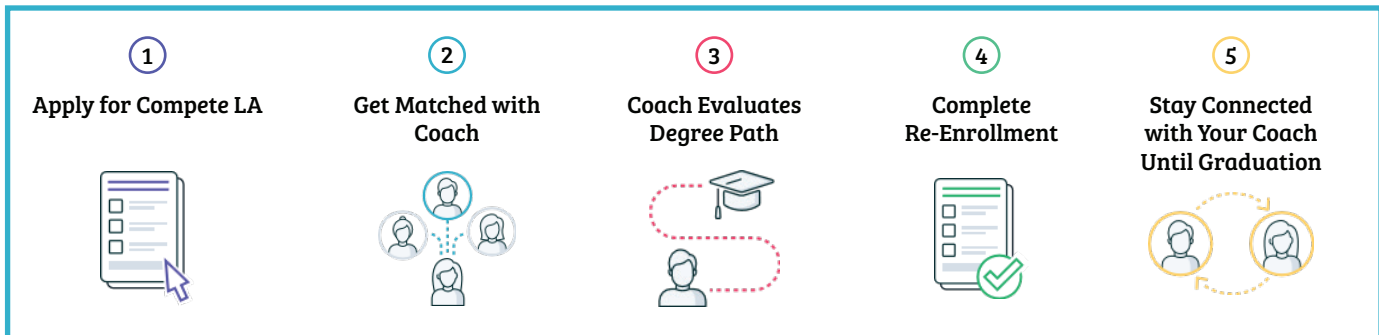
Generations later, all our gumbos challenge Number 147 and remain fresh and unspoiled. We should expect nothing else in these lands—at a campus built atop river silts from a prehistoric river delta as it met a primordial Gulf, where our land bears scars of row planting, swamp logging and oilfield drilling, where our school mascots include tarpons and gators and pirates, where spent oilfield drilling bits and pipeline scrap-iron become fence posts and barbecue pits, where our fishing tournaments are called rodeos, where the holy trinity is caramelized as often as it is catechized, and where we fight to preserve land and culture.

It’s told that Lafcadio Hearn became so impassioned with living on the coast that he began to pronounce his surname “heron,” as one would pronounce the name of the common shorebird. Beyond its literal translation, his proverb Number 147 is figurative for the idea that “If you want something to be well done, you must look after it yourself.” That idea, with regard to the Louisiana coast, is an idea that for Nicholls is a garden not far away. — Dr. John Doucet

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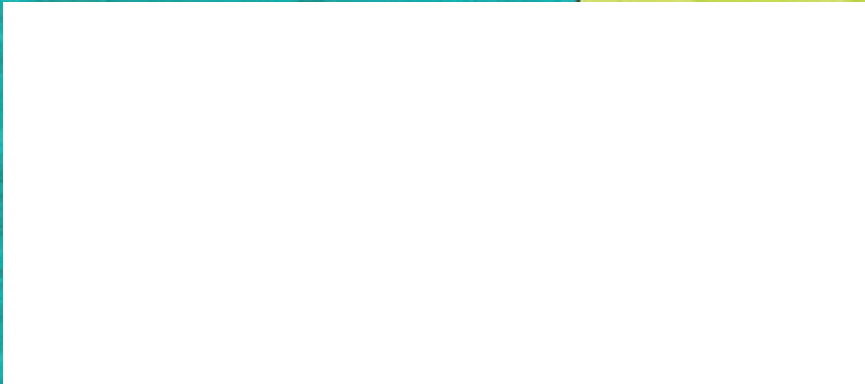
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