1990 construction rises 47% in Lafayette Parish—director

By CALVIN LEAR
Acadiana bureau

LAFAYETTE — The value of new construction in Lafayette Parish jumped 47 percent from 1989 to 1990, reflecting increased construction activity in both the residential and commercial sectors, according to Acadian Metro Code's director.

"Everything points to 1991 also showing an increase in construction and development activity," said Weston Pierret. "The construction industry has been on the upswing for the past two years."

Metro Code's fiscal year, for which construction figures are kept, is November to October. The department's value figures account only for improvements made to a parcel of land, Pierret said.

Construction of new residences, mostly three-bedroom homes in southwest Lafayette, leaped from 171 in the 1989 fiscal year to 317 for the 1990 year, Pierret said. The value in 1989 was $16.6 million for residential construction, and $31 million — almost double — in the 1990 fiscal year.

Commercial construction was even better. The total construction value on 42 projects in 1990 was $24.4 million, topping 1989's 39 projects valued at $7 million, Pierre said.

He attributed the jump largely to the beginning of work on the $4 million Auto Zone distribution plant near Carencro, and also the University of Southwestern Louisiana's $8 million Wetlands Research Center. At least two hospitals, Lafayette General and Our Lady of Lourdes, also had major construction in 1990, said Pierret.

The last year Lafayette Parish experienced numbers like 1990 in residential and commercial construction was 1985. That year, $33 million in residential construction took place, while there was $39.7 million in commercial construction.

The best year was 1982, at the peak of Lafayette's economic boom, when residential construction included 1,344 housing starts at a value of $82.2 million, and 489 commercial projects valued at $214.7 million.

The first quarter of the 1990-1991 fiscal year also shows a positive trend, according to Pierret.

In November 1990, 25 houses went under construction, valued at $3 million. Four commercial projects received permits, with a total value of $992,700. In December, there were 22 housing starts at a $2.5 million value; three commercial projects at $5.8 million.

In January, 25 housing starts received permits at a $2.4 million value. Seven commercial construction projects got permits, with the work valued at $1.3 million.

"I don't think you'll see the value in 1991 that we had in 1990," Pierret said, again because of the Auto Zone and the Wetlands Center projects. "But there are some large projects in the planning stage."

One of those is a proposed shopping center at Kaliste Saloom Road and Ambassador Caffery Parkway. The shopping center is to include an Albertson's grocery store. The University of Southwestern Louisiana also is securing another major research center, although construction is not expected to begin this fiscal year.

Pierret cautioned that it will be some time before even more commercial activity occurs in the parish.

"Let's be objective, there's still a great deal of commercial buildings vacant," he said. "There's still a lot of space to be eaten up."

Once the vacancies are filled, the demand should further increase for new commercial construction, he said.