Area Has Potential To Be Industrial, Tourist Mecca

The progressive people and natural resources of Acadiana are a winning potential combination, the fulfillment of which would mean the creation of a diversified, year-round economy, bringing an even higher standard of living here, alongside the benefits of a future that make life here so much worth living.

With Acadiana’s assets, there is no reason why this region should not become an industrial and tourist mecca second to none. But three things must be done:

1. Our waterways must be cleaned and made attractive for tourism, widened for waterfowl commerce, and developed for industrial location.

2. A concerted regional effort must be made to promote the tourist dollar and the industrial investor, and to create the things that will attract them.

3. While doing this, we must be certain to maintain and protect the natural wealth of our area.

But there are no loopholes. In our midst we have a prime example in Avery Island where a major tourist attraction exists alongside a major industry, with full protection of the environment. Avery Island did not just happen. It took careful planning and a thorough execution. And, a concerted effort to maintain the compatibility of the industry and the beauty. There is no reason why these ingredients cannot be found in a much larger scale throughout Lafayette Parish and Acadiana.

The right hand must know what the left hand is doing. Those concerned with the promotion of tourism must coordinate their efforts with those who have industry. Both must do their share for the development of waterways, protection of natural resources, and promotion of Acadiana in the place to be for jobs or for fun.

Those who work in Acadiana must know what the other is doing. Citizens should know what the parishes are about, and all must work in the same harness, so that by pooling resources, manpower and ideas they can minimize their weaknesses through the strength of others and thus increase their strengths through unity of purpose. The piecemeal, uncoordinated efforts that have been tried have been largely unsuccessful. A single, coordinated, concerted effort is needed.

The Teco-Vernon freshwater project has the potential of several parishes working together to do something about the pollution of our streams and rivers. Even the project is not moving as rapidly as some hope, there are some who are against it, or who label it as governmental red tape and simply lack the time for lack of doing.

Completion of that project, which has been anticipated to move quickly, is only four to five years off. The commission is currently in the final stages of acquiring right-of-way for a conveyance channel near the McAlindon Floodway. The Army Corps of Engineers should complete engineering and design work this year and construction should begin next year and take three to four years to complete.

But progress is being made, and a similar position on an effort made to cut red tape and petty politics, can accomplish the much-needed cleaning of the Vermilion River, bring what is often called the Lousiana project off to a good start. We must, in the creation of a master plan, be brought into the many interested parties. The time is short and we must get going. Government is a precision business, but there is a lack of action.

The vitality of the local level is necessary to accomplish these things, but it must be a concerted action at all levels of government. We have expressed disappointment in the past at the lack of action on many of these projects at the congressional level.

We now have a new congressional delegation. We expect that we have not left to Washington to take an active role in securing federal backing and federal funding for Acadiana’s waterfront projects. Despite its seniority, our new delegation to Washington has secured a seat on committees with jurisdiction over our waterways. Unless they become active and influential in those committees, these projects that have long been languishing will remain unfulfilled.

Tourists spend billions of dollars annually in the South and in Louisiana, as tourism has become big business. And Acadiana has a head start on many of the areas of the country because of the beauty of our countryside, our unique French flavor, our museums, our position at the crossroads of major highways, and our coastal assets.

But anybody’s going to be a host to our door unless they know we are here. Acadiana can be easily sold to tourist and industrialist alike, if we get them here to see what they offer and display their best. Efforts for regional promotion and development such as those that have been heralded by the Acadiana Economic Development District and the Louisiana-Georgia Waterway Commission, and the State Board of Commerce and Industry must be active in promoting Acadiana. And we must become developers and salesmen of our own region.

There is so much that Lafayette and Acadiana can offer its visitors. We have the finest climate in the world. We have nature beaches easy to reach and enjoyable to enjoy. We have fishing and hunting spots that truly contribute to Louisiana’s being a sportsman’s paradise. Best of all, there is the spirit of Acadiana, that indefinable magic that captivates every visitor who drinks of bayou water.

But that story has not often been told piecemeal or not at all. A comprehensive listing of the bonanzas of this area should be compiled and made available to tourists when they visit and for promotion of Acadiana for those who want to come here. In any major tourist area one finds means of promotional material, tour guides, brochures listing tourist spots, and maps and diagrams saying, “Go here and see or do this.” Yet, in our knowledge, such material has never been readily available here, if compiled at all.

It is our understanding that several efforts are now being made to compile a comprehensive promotional booklet, outlining one-day tours of Acadiana and giving points of interest and how to get to them. Such is long overdue and the sooner it is available, the better.

We were optimistic a year ago that the nine-parish Acadiana Tourism Council would take the lead in starting a brand new campaign for Acadiana, in which Lafayette would play a leading role.

But the council has not yet come up to expectations, with little accomplishment shown for a year’s work. If it is not going to do the job, it should be abolished and replaced with a partner that can. We’ve missed the last time for action.

In developing Acadiana, we must be careful lest we destroy those things that are our pride attributes, things that are equally vital that they are not allowed to deteriorate.

The Atchafalaya basin on our doorstep, for example, offers vast potential as a tourist attraction, as a mecca for sportsmen. But, unfortunately, while committee study and argue, the basin continues to deteriorate and its potential to Acadiana remains submerged.

Squandered resources can never be recouped, as we are learning in our present natural gas crisis. In studying the area’s potential, we must also look for areas that can set aside for preservation as parks, beaches, mission and historic areas. We must not let a bulldozer destroy what nature has provided. If it can be used as easily and protected. We must insure that new industries will not pollute our rivers that we are now working to reclaim, and each of us must not become a thoughtless producer of beauty with our litter and garbage.

But most of all we must get moving to form that regional partnership that means so much to all of us and to translate into accomplishment the potential of Lafayette and Acadiana.

The Advocate pledges its full cooperation in any endeavor to bring into being the winning combination of tourism and industry in a clean and beautiful Acadiana.

(Tomorrow: Lafayette)