AT THE
MALL

A place to talk...  ...to play...
...to stroll...

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In the early morning, the sun burning through the South Louisiana haze, drove open at Baton Rouge malls. It's warm, much like the coast before a hurricane. Then they come. Vast, empty parking expanses begin to fill: station wagons packed with youngsters, truck operators, American sedans splashed with mud, RVs with bumper stickers, pickup trucks outfitted with oversize tires. License plates let you know most folks are from East Baton Rouge Parish, but they are from other places too—DeRidder, St. Francisville, New Roads, Pierre Part, St. Amant. Scattered throughout the area are license plates from other states—Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and, occasionally, a Michigan or Utah. Twenty-five years ago, they weren't here. Today they're everywhere. What used to be farms or woods or country crossroads have become malls... If you want to find America today, this is where you have to look.

— Charles Kuralt  
CBS Reports: "After the Dream Comes True"

Baton Rouge, like the rest of America, has turned to the malls and malling shopping centers for its shopping. Malls have already changed not only the way we shop, but also how we socialize, exercise, invest money, see a doctor, meet and pursue happiness.

They pour into the mall: matures in well-proportioned suits, slim young women decked in "Dynasty" fashions and "Falcon Crest" barettes, skinny young men in tight pants, teens sporting the latest T-shirt fads and over-sized sweats, moms pushing strollers, construction workers in hard hats and businesswomen in conservative coats and...
to walk past the storefronts of smaller tenants. The anchor stores can make or break the success of a mall. Cortana's five major tenants are Goldsandn, Dick's, and a Sears, J.C. Penney's, and Service Merchandise (formerly Wilson's). Tucked between these are 327 specialty stores, service shops, restaurants. Cortana offers more than 3.5 million square feet of shopping area.

The only regional mall serving the area, Cortana is open Monday through Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Entrance No. 3 is opened at 7 a.m. for walkers, although all the stores are open at this time of day.

Audrey Manist works at the Cortana information booth on Monday mornings and Tuesday nights. "We do a lot of business when there's a storm," she said. "A lot of people who don't have electricity come to the mall. They shop and wander around until they get power back at home."

"When schools are out we have a lot of children," added Manist. She directs people to shops and restaurants and hands the mall's shuttle rentals. Shuttles rent for $1 an hour, and it's a busy corner.

"We also have two wheelchair that are available without charge," said Manist. She explained that one Baton Rouge woman was delighted to have discovered the wheelchairs. Housebound due to a crippling illness, she now has a friend bring her to the mall where she can get a wheelchair, shop and be out with people.

People walk through the mall talking and munching popcarts, cookies, ice cream cones, nachos, drinks — you name it. It's a big job for the housekeeping employees, and they're kept busy all the time.

Cote has been with housekeeping at Cortana for almost five years.