Acadian Village turns 20 years old this year
Here’s a look at why it really exists

The community is behind this project 100 percent. If it weren’t for the community it couldn’t survive.

A. J. LeBlanc

many people do it, how can you lose your pride if they don’t?”

The money is raised through various means, such as the sale of gift shops, dances, and other events.

A. J. LeBlanc, a volunteer at the Village since 1976, speaks of them with pride.

“Some of the younger people work here, but it is not just for the money. It is to keep our traditions alive.”

LeBlanc said the money generally goes to improve the facility and maintain its operations.

“They help keep the village going, and the money helps pay for the maintenance.”

From left, Keith Monard and Bobby Truhan, client-workers at Acadian Village, prepare a new flower bed.

Bob Lowe gets volunteer award

L.

Acadian businessman Bob Lowe has been awarded the Volunteer of the Year Award by the Louisiana Association of Retarded Citizens (LARC). The honor is bestowed annually to an outstanding volunteer who has shown outstanding commitment to his or her community and for his or her contribution to the improvement of persons with mental retardation.

Lowe, who initially served as manager of a department store, was later appointed as a volunteer director at Acadian Village. Since then, he has served in various capacities, including as a board member and executive director.

In his acceptance speech, Lowe praised the staff and volunteers who work at Acadian Village.

“It has been a privilege to work with such dedicated individuals.”

Thank you to all who have contributed to the success of Acadian Village.

— Acadian Village

THE ADVOCATE

Bob Lowe, who worked initially as an unpaid director of Acadian Village, just received LARC’s Jeff and Nollie Guidry Volunteer Award. Under LARC’s recommendation, he also will be part of a relay team that will help carry the Olympic flame through Acadiana en route to the summer Olympics in Atlanta.

Please see Lowe, D-3

THE ADVOCATE

J. P. Denee

A. J. LeBlanc takes a minute out on the bridge leading to the chapel at Acadian Village. “My heart has been in it from the start,” said LeBlanc, who cut the ribbon when the Village opened in 1976.

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Lowe became an advocate of improved conditions for the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled in 1950. Serving in leadership positions with various statewide groups, he worked successfully for legislation which provided improved living conditions and educational opportunities for that population.

At the same time, he inspired hundreds of others to assume responsible roles in getting state laws written, funding provided, and programs implemented for meeting educational, social, medical, and other needs for those handicapped citizens. He also spearheaded programs for the prevention of mental retardation.

His most recent contribution was that of leading a Lafayette Civic Club effort to develop an expanded parking lot that was needed critically by LARC to accommodate growing crowds at the Acadian Village’s annual Christmas Lighting Program.

His presence is still felt in the development of the New Hope Center, a complete facility for the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled, which was established in 1961 near what is today the Lafayette Regional Airport. He planned the programs and raised funds for the buildings needed by that facility.

When Kilas Alleman donated 22 acres for use as a center for that population, Lowe directed the activities which resulted in the relocation of the New Hope facility from the airport area to the Alleman property. He enlisted the resources of the community and special units of the Armed Services in shaping grounds and in constructing the classrooms, cafeterias and other facilities that are today part of LARC.

The LARC facility, known as the Alleman Center, has been recognized over the years as a leading full-spectrum provider of services for the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled.

Lowe continued his service over the ensuing years, serving as LARC president in 1955, 1965, 1966 and 1967. He also served as president of the Louisiana ARC and held other key offices in that state organization.

He played a key role in the creation of Acadian Village, which exists solely for the purpose of employing the handicapped, and for generating funds for LARC’s various programs. He has served on its governing commission.

His most recent contribution was the founding of a Lafayette Civic Club effort to develop an expanded parking lot that was needed by LARC to accommodate growing crowds at the Acadian Village’s annual Christmas Lighting Program.

Using his contacts in the local contracting community, he arranged for donated equipment and personnel and supervised the major construction effort that was involved in development of that lot. According to Weaver, LARC would not have had the capacity to do that on its own.

Working to benefit the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled has been only one of the major focuses of Lowe’s involvement in community service. He also has been a prime supporter of the well-known Southwest Louisiana Education and Referral Center, the American Lung Association, and the Louisiana Epilepsy Association, giving generously of his time and resources to those community service organizations.

A successful businessman, he has been at the forefront in the development of programs and passage of laws to strengthen business and industry in Louisiana. He also played a major role in the passage of the Right to Work Law in Louisiana and was a founder of the Louisiana Political Education Committee (LAPEC), a grass roots organization which also has had a profound impact on business and politics in the State of Louisiana.

That was fulfilling, Weber said, given the torch that Lowe has carried and the flame that he has kept burning over the past 40 years for the cause of mental retardation and developmental disabilities.

Editor’s Note: This article was submitted, courtesy of LARC.

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Happening things

I n the average over 100,000 visitors see Acadian Village each year. Last year, 3,760 family groups visited the site.

Director A. J. LeBlanc said “a good 25 or 30” weddings take place there each year in the Village chapel. "Sometimes two or three a day."

"We've had a lot of very unique weddings here," he said. "One man was a priest, and they flew in bowlers from all over the world. They estimated the bowlers cost $2,000."

The weather worked in favor of that event, he said, adding that with the exotic flowers draped everywhere it was "beautiful.

Another time, he said, a young woman from California happened to visit here just before she was to be married. "She fell in love with the little chapel and moved the whole wedding party here," said LeBlanc.

He said the Village also has had "a lot of important dignitaries and such." Some of them include President of Belgium, the Ambassador of France, and Attorney General Janet Reno. "She was impressed," he said of her visit. "It was a very nice woman."

"A lot of people tell us that they enjoy this facility more than they do Williamsburg (Virginia) because we have very few items undressed. They can get a feel for the old, and they can touch it."

LeBlanc believes the Village is better loved by the public locally because it is larger and larger, largely because it is accessible to anyone from any part of the area. "It's a bit," he said with a smile. "Belmarre the Cajuns."