Chicot State Park rededicated

By JEFF GUILORY
Parish Editor

It's an often used cliche, but in this case it surely seems fitting, "Chicot State Park, you've certainly aged gracefully."

Just like fine wine, Louisiana's largest and arguably the most beautiful state park gets better with age. Today, the ole gal turned 50 years old.

"There's nothing like a birthday to make you think about the future," expressed Mark Hilzim, secretary of the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, as he spoke to approximately 150 persons who attended the 50th Commemorative Anniversary Dedication Program held Saturday morning.

Fifty years ago today, on June 6, 1943, Governor Sam Jones officially dedicated the new park as it opened its doors to the public.

"It's certainly a pleasure to see so many friends of Chicot here today. If it wouldn't be for you, this park wouldn't have succeeded, so I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Office of State Parks to thank you for your support over these past 50 years," continued the secretary.

"Chicot has and will have a tremendous impact on the area's economy. We expect up to 250,000 people a year come to this park, generating approximately $3 million a year for the local economy. It's our job to make sure those numbers increase in the future.

"I think it will. I can honestly say this is the best Chicot has looked in many years."

Hilzim explained that state financial woes have taken its toll on the State Parks budget.

"Tourism is the second largest industry in Louisiana and the largest industry in the country and the world. We are the catalyst for tourism here in the state. Unfortunately, we've been faced with the challenge of promoting and managing parks like Chicot, while at the same time absorbing millions of dollars of budget cuts," explained Hilzim.

"Right now we're waiting for the Governor to sign a bill to keep the commemorative parks open in the state."

Senator Don Hines of Bunkie said things at Chicot are moving in the right direction.

"When I was first elected I met with John

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LaHaye and Jeff Guillory to learn about the needs of Chicot Park. Since that time we've made great gains. My next goal is to raise the water level of the lake. I commit to you today that I will get the water level raised at least a foot," stressed the freshman senator as the crowd erupted in applause.

"I also intend to fight to get an assistant manager to help Manager Jo Edwards run this park."

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**Plaque presented**

Dr. Joey Soileau, president of the Ville Platte Rotary Club, recognized four veteran members Al Fuselier, Moon Carson, Burnett Jeansonne and Raymond Guillory, who unveiled a special 50th anniversary plaque. The plaque will be displayed at the main entrance of the South Landing.

A beautiful dogwood tree was also planted before the conclusion of the ceremony.

According to Manager Jo Edwards, thousands of visitors enjoyed the daylong activities offered free at the park on Saturday. Following the ceremony, Wildlife and Fisheries representatives Jim Robinson, Jody David and Chris Cormier offered a casting clinic, fish identification, boating safety demonstration and other educational material at the big shelter.

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**TREE PLANTING** - A beautiful eight-foot dogwood tree was planted during Saturday's 50th anniversary ceremony at Chicot State Park. Doing the ceremonial honors, from left to right, are Norwood Davis.

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**EDUCATION AND ENFORCEMENT** - The Wildlife and Fisheries team of Chris Cormier, left, Jim Robinson, second from left, and Jody David, right, conducted several educational activities Saturday afternoon at Chicot State Park's big shelter. (Gazette photo by Jeff Guillory)