Covington

During the beginning of the 20th century, these families and the city’s other residents saw Covington through the Great Depression and two World Wars. In the second half of the century, the Causeway was the catalyst for a gradually increased population and the economic growth that followed. And in the twilight of its first 200 years, in 2005, the city survived the destruction of Hurricane Katrina to welcome many new residents who relocated here as a result of the storm—the latest “come hither” to add their flavor to our unique city.

In 1813, when Covington was officially founded, the small rural community was poised to grow into the bustling port it would become. In 1913, after its first 100 years, the city could again be optimistic about its future. Residents profited from the commercial boom that came with the railroads and the increase in schooner and steamer traffic—and the city enjoyed its growing reputation as a “resort area.”

Today, in 2013, we mark another 100-year milestone. There is little left of the rural economy of 1813; the trees have been harvested and the land is filled with homes and schools and shopping malls. The railroads, schooners and steamers of 1913 that once made good on their great promise are gone. Automobiles and 18-wheelers using city streets and interstates have replaced the railroads and also the ships that used Lake Pontchartrain and the rivers as thoroughfares.

When Covington celebrates its 300th anniversary in 2113, what will that era’s “Inside Northside” say about Covington’s people in 2013? What are the factors that will be seen to have made that generation of residents optimistic, allowing the city to be poised for its next evolutionary step? Will other factors be seen as having had a negative impact?

Will it be the emerging 1-10/1-12 economic corridor attracting new industries? Or the population growth, with its need for housing, schools, shopping and medical services? Will one particular industry take off—perhaps information technology? Might the growing cultural economy, arts community and the renovated Southern Hotel be the new incarnation of the “must visit” reputation the “resort years” enjoyed?

As we said at the end of the introduction, “Covington, your future is calling”

new life for the Southern Hotel

When cultural changes caused the decline in the popularity of Covington as a resort area, the Southern Hotel closed and was adapted for a variety of purposes, including being home to St. Tammany Parish’s administrative offices.

Luckily, the striking building was never demolished. It caught the eye of attorney Lisa Condrey Ward. “We moved here from New Orleans in 1999. I started talking about it, probably the day after we moved here, ‘Gosh, why hasn’t somebody turned that back into a hotel?’

She now owns the hotel, and its rebirth is well underway, with an anticipated opening in the fall of 2013. Ward says, “It’s going to have 41 rooms and a restaurant on the New Hampshire corner. We’re looking for an exciting restaurateur to work with on the build-out.” Ward hopes her plans for the property will offer today’s visitors as the elements did at the turn of the century. “I want people to come here and enjoy things like the Tammany Trace—we’re going to have bikes available and kayaks for the river.”

Renovations include facilities that would include a variety of purposes, including being home to St. Tammany Parish’s administrative offices. Covington Bicentennial
Champagne Beverage Company

The TOTAL Beverage Distributor

No discussion of northshore business leadership would be complete without including Champagne Beverage Company and its 56-year history on the northshore. Under the leadership of Joel Champagne since 1996, the company has grown to an organization of 130 team members. They are a recognized market leader and a real home-grown success story.

In 1957, Joseph and Audrey Champagne started the company with a new Anheuser-Busch franchise in Covington. "It was a one-man operation for the first year, but my father sold about 50,000 cases of Budweiser" says Joel. Eventually, he began working at his father's side. "On weekends when I was little—8 years old—I was helping him deliver beer." After working weekends and summers at the company during high school and college, Joel began working with the company full time in 1981. With the help of many loyal managers and employees, Champagne Beverage sold 3.4 million cases of product last year. It is an accomplishment that makes Joel very proud of the team he leads.

One of the most valuable things Joel learned from his father was the importance of paying attention to detail. "He was my mentor, teaching me everything I know about this business," says Joel. "Though times have changed, much remains the same. The important things—being part of the community, meeting people and thanking customers for their business—add up. That's what this company is built on."

As the second generation of Champagnes to run Champagne Beverage Company, Joel, Jill and their family are proud to continue that service tradition begun by his parents. They have been able to take that concept to a whole new level. Champagne Beverage has become much more than a beer distributor... it is a TOTAL beverage distributor.

"Our product lines have undergone quite a bit of diversification," says Joel. "In addition to beer, we now distribute soft drinks, teas, milk, waters, energy drinks, coffee, as well as wines and spirits." The relationships the Champagnes have established with loyal customers over the years have made this diversification very successful.

Champagne has been responsive to many changes in the marketplace, including the slow but steady growth in popularity of craft beer over the past few years. This has driven an alignment with local and national craft beer producers, including Covington Brewhouse, Parish Brewing, Bayou Teche Brewing, Chafunkta Brewing, Tin Roof Brewing, Lazy Magnolia Brewing, Saint Arnold Brewing, New Belgium Brewing, Moxyan's Brewing and Goose Island Brewing. Other new offerings in the move toward a complete beverage distributorship include Mike's Hard Lemonade, Woodchuck Cider, Nestle Waters, Arizona Teas, Nesquik, Exxyence Energy, Real Tree Energy, Red Line Energy, PJ's Coffee, Old New Orleans Rum, Ponchartrain Vineyards Wines, Jarvis Wines, Silver Ridge Wines, Zichichi Wines and many more.

When asked what his father would think of the Champagne Beverage Company today, Joel says, "He would be happy, to say the least. My father sold one brand of beer, Budweiser. Today, we distribute more than 150 different brands of beer alone. Anheuser-Busch continues to develop new brands to meet the ever-changing consumer needs. This, combined with our new suppliers, allows us a very diverse portfolio to offer our customers. Yes...he would be impressed!"

Champagne Beverage is well positioned for future growth with its expanded product portfolio. Though Champagne Beverage's market footprint has remained the same since its founding, Joel has also taken a big step into the New Orleans market with his partner, Mockler Beverage from Baton Rouge. This venture, Southern Eagle Sales and Services, has given them the chance to bring the talents and experience of those 56 years of success into the competitive New Orleans market. It has also given the Champagnes a new perspective.

Champagne Beverage has approximately 1,000 accounts on the northshore and Southern Eagle has around 2,500 in New Orleans. The primary difference in the two endeavors is the impact of tourism on the business in the southshore market. In 2012, New Orleans had more than nine million visitors to the city.

Working in a family business is challenging but can be very rewarding during exciting times of change and expansion. Joel and Jill have worked diligently to structure the company to provide opportunity to the next generation. Joel Jr. has been on board for three years and Jayne, who is getting married in August, plans to begin her career with the family business after her wedding. Julia has two years left at LSU but hopes that she will join the company as well.

Continuing his father's commitment to the community, Joel makes sure that everyone on the Champagne team understands the impact that commitment has to their success. "The community is our business partner," he says. "We strive day in and day out to be an outstanding corporate citizen. We love to support those who support us."

Joel's philosophy on work and the basis of what he hopes to pass on to the next generation of Champagne Beverage is rather simple: "Be dedicated to your job, have pride in everything you do, pay attention to detail, customer service is KING, work smart...and if you do all of that, celebrate with family and friends."

Cheers!
St. Tammany Parish Hospital has literally grown up with the Covington community.

In the mid-1900s, the northshore began its transition from a predominantly rural area to a destination and lifestyle community. The development of the Causeway generated the migration that provided a steadily increasing population, and the need for adequate health services became a growing concern.

On May 4, 1953, the Women’s Progressive Union of Covington realized the fruits of its labor when an eight-year grassroots effort to raise awareness of the need for a parish hospital culminated in the groundbreaking for St. Tammany Parish Hospital in 1954.

The hospital’s legacy of caring relies upon the St. Tammany Hospital Foundation, established in 2003, to sustain the healing work of STPH physicians and staff. Through development of philanthropic support, the foundation seeks to fortify the promise of world-class health care close to home for generations to come.

Harry Warner, a lifelong Covington resident and member of the foundation’s Board of Trustees, has seen the hospital go from being a small hospital that cares to a large hospital that cares. He says, “I am proud to call Covington my home—and proud to call STPH my hospital.”

Today, STPH includes the main hospital, outpatient surgery center, diagnostic centers, women’s center, wound care clinic, home health, hospice, sleep disorders center, parenting center, community wellness center, primary care physician offices throughout the district and the comprehensive cancer center through its partnership with Mary Bird Perkins. The skybridge connecting the cancer center to the hospital near Covington’s southern city limit serves as a gateway to the city.

Technology has forever changed our world and promises to continue to do so. Our very own “hometown hospital” embraces the pace of change in health care while its caregivers embrace the lives touched by it. STPH promises world-class health care and delivers on that promise by offering many of the same state-of-the-art techniques and technologies found at the best medical centers around the country. But what this hospital is known for, what patients, families and members of the community write letters about, tell friends about, take pride in, is the healing touch offered by a staff not hardened, but allowed to care.

“Our culture here is very personal, very caring,” says Patti Ellish, hospital president and CEO. “We can’t help but treat every patient like they are our family. We like to say that while the health care we deliver is high-tech, our people will always remain high-touch.”

St. Tammany Parish Hospital has become a shining example of the area’s progressive growth. The hospital has evolved from a small, 16-bed facility with two physicians and 18 employees to an award-winning 237-bed health system with more than 400 physicians and 1700 employees in 10 locations, serving the inpatient and outpatient needs of Covington and surrounding areas.

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This bicentennial year finds St. Tammany Parish Hospital embarking once again on an expansion project, one which will introduce specialized pediatric emergency care while expanding the size, capacity, expertise and technology of the emergency department and increasing the number of private rooms inside the hospital.

In an industry that is ultimately about people, which often gets lost in machinery and technology, in a small town growing at a big-city pace, St. Tammany Parish Hospital remains progressive and personal every step of the way.

St. Tammany Parish Hospital is located at 1202 S. Tyler St. in Covington, 898-4000. stph.org. stthfoundation.org.
2013 LOUISIANA COMMEMORATIVE

Biking into the Bayou State

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