Gambling continues to evolve in Louisiana

Advocate staff report

Many types of gambling are legal in Baton Rouge, from casino-style games at two riverboat and video-poker machines in bars and restaurants to bingo and a statewide lottery.

After controversy erupted over how gambling was legalized in Louisiana, the state Legislature in 1996 decided to put the fate of many forms of gambling in the hands of voters in each parish.

East Baton Rouge Parish voters opted to continue to allow river-boat casinos, but voted to eliminate video poker in bars, restaurants, truck stops and similar facilities.

No new video poker licenses will be issued in East Baton Rouge Parish and the 32 other parishes that voted to ban video poker. But existing video poker outlets in those parishes will be allowed to continue until mid-1999 so their owners can recoup their investments.

In New Orleans, voters overwhelmingly supported the reopening of a land casino there.

But the financially troubled casino has been in bankruptcy court since late 1995. Also, the casino's contract with the state, which would let it re-open, is the subject of legislative and legal battles.

The casino has yet to open its doors again.

Baton Rouge's two riverboat casinos — the Belle of Baton Rouge and Casino Rouge — have been in business on the downtown riverfront since late 1994, offering such casino games as slot machines, blackjack, roulette, poker and craps tables.

The Belle of Baton Rouge docks at Catfish Town, near the Interstate 10 Mississippi River bridge. Casino Rouge docks near the state governmental complex at the north end of downtown.

Both have lounges and restaurants on shore.

The Belle of Baton Rouge has an extensive entertainment complex at Catfish Town in a collection of renovated warehouse buildings.

Casino Rouge has a nearby "arena" — which is actually a big vinyl tent — where concerts, boxing matches and other events are held.

State law requires casino boats to cruise for at least 90 minutes during each three-hour period. However, cruising is at the captain's discretion and the boats have often stayed docked because of bad water or weather conditions.

Daily cruise schedules are available from the casinos, which are open seven days a week. The Belle and Casino Rouge are among 13 boats now operating in Louisiana.

Horse racing, charitable bingo, a lottery and video poker are among other forms of gambling authorized in Louisiana.

Most of the various forms of gambling were approved between 1990 and 1992.

The exceptions are pari-mutuel wagering at horse tracks and bingo, which have been around for many years.

Here's a rundown on gambling in Louisiana:

- **Casino gambling.** The Legislature voted in 1992 to allow a single, land casino at the site of the city-owned Rivergate Convention Center in New Orleans.

A year earlier, legislators voted to permit riverboat gambling in Louisiana, limiting the number of casino boats to 15. Mississippi legalized dockside casinos there before Louisiana licensed riverboat casinos.

- **Horse tracks.** There are four — Delta Downs in Vinton, Evangeline Downs in Lafayette and two others.

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Baton Rouge has first class fire protection

Advocate staff report

Eleven fire departments, most of them volunteer, each cover parts of East Baton Rouge Parish. City-parish Emergency Medical Services provide ambulance and paramedic service parishwide.

The Baton Rouge Fire Department (354-1400) handles fires and other emergency calls within the city limits. The department is one of only a few in the country with a Class 1 rating from the Property Insurance Association.

For fire, medical or police emergencies, call 911. The operators can help dispatch the appropriate authorities nearest to the emergency.

EMS Administrative offices can be reached at 389-SISS.

The Baker Volunteer Fire Department (775-3712) and the Zachary Fire Department (654-0026) each respond to calls within their own cities and just outside their city limits, officials said.

Zachary Fire Chief Doug Gleason said if a call is just outside the official area, firefighters will often go because they can sometimes get to places faster than a volunteer department.

Fire district maps divide the rest of the parish among eight volunteer fire departments.

- The Chaneysville Volunteer Fire Department (654-9571) covers the north central part of the parish up to the border with East Feliciana Parish.
- Moving south, the Central Volunteer Fire Department (261-2000) picks up where Chaneysville stops. It runs east to the Livingston Parish line, west to the Comite River and south to the Baton Rouge city limits.
- The Pride Volunteer Fire Department (654-3903) covers the northeastern edge of the parish that is not covered by Chaneysville or Central.
- Fire Protection District 6 (355-3110) covers the area from the intersection of Hooper and Plank roads along Hooper Road to the Comite River. Its eastern border is the Comite River and its western border is Airline Highway. The district runs south to Greenwell Springs Road between Lanier Drive and Sherwood Forest Boulevard.
- Brownsfield Volunteer Fire Department (778-0344) covers the area that runs from the intersection of Plank and Charlton roads to the north and runs along Baker's southern city limits. Its western boundary is Gibbens Road and its eastern boundary is the Comite River.
- The Alsen-St. Irma Lee Fire Department (774-3749) covers the area bordered by the Baker Canal to the north, La. 19 to the east, Thomas Road to the south and the Mississippi River to the west.
- The St. George Volunteer Fire Department (389-8600) covers the southern part of the parish. It includes everything in the parish from the city limits south to the parish line.
- The East Side Volunteer Fire Department (272-7779) covers the southeastern part of the parish not covered by Baton Rouge, Central or the St. George Volunteer Fire departments.

In the city limits, the Arson Division (354-1419) investigates the causes of fires and arrests arson suspects.

Outside the city, the East Baton Rouge Parish Arson Task Force (389-5239) performs similar duties.

Baker Assistant Chief Earl Deed said fire department boundaries are irregular and sometimes arbitrary, so it's not crucial that people remember which fire district they're in.

"No matter where you live in this parish, if you dial 911 you'll get the people that can help you," Deed said.

The Baton Rouge Fire Department's Class 1 rating, which has been maintained since 1979, means the lowest possible fire insurance costs for residents and business owners.

Gambling

Continued from Page 14

the Fairgrounds in New Orleans and Louisiana Downs in Bossier City.

Off-track betting parlors also dot the state, including one in Port Allen, across the Mississippi river from Baton Rouge.

- The Louisiana Lottery. The lottery here is much the same as those in other states, with instant scratch-off tickets, weekly Pick 6 Lotto, a Pick 5 game drawn five times per week and daily Pick 3 game. Louisiana also is part of multi-state Powerball lottery drawing.
- Video Poker. The electronic draw poker games are in bars, restaurants and similar establishments.

Players bet from 25 cents to $2 a hand for a chance to win a maximum jackpot of $500.

Under state law, establishments that serve liquor or beer on the premises can have up to three video poker terminals each. Truck stops can have up to 50. There is no limit on the number allowed at race tracks and off-track betting parlors.

- Bingo. Nonprofit groups may sponsor bingo games. Bingo is currently played at two halls in Baton Rouge.

Foster

Continued from Page 12

tation is pushing to get the New Orleans land casino out of a federal bankruptcy court.

Foster professes to be against gambling, but argues the state must honor its contract with casino developers.

Foster also says a renegotiated contract gives the state greater guarantees that casino developers will pay the minimum $100 million annual casino tax.

Louisiana has enjoyed a boom since the economy over the past year or so, which has left state leaders with hundreds of millions of dollars extra money to spend.

But the growth has slowed, and state leaders had a much harder time putting together a budget for the 1998-99 fiscal year that begins July 1.
City police, state police, sheriff’s office protect EBR
Baker, Zachary, LSU and Southern have their own police departments

Advocate staff report

East Baton Rouge Parish has three primary local law enforcement agencies, and four smaller police departments.

All emergencies can be routed to the appropriate agency by calling 911.

The Baton Rouge Police Department handles crimes inside the city limits. Non-emergency complaints can be reported by calling 389-3831. The department’s main number is 389-3800.

The East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff’s Office has jurisdiction all over the parish, but primarily handles crimes that happen outside the city limits. The Sheriff’s Office can be reached at 389-5000.

Louisiana State Police has its state headquarters and a regional office in Baton Rouge. State troopers’ primary job is patrolling the state’s highway system.

State police also investigates some crimes and the State Police Crime Lab serves most law enforcement agencies in the area.

The Troop A regional office can be reached at 754-8500. To reach State Police headquarters, call 925-6006.

Baker and Zachary are in East Baton Rouge Parish, but are separate cities and each has its own police department.

Baker Police can be reached at 775-6000. To reach Zachary Police, call 654-9393.

LSU and Southern universities also have their own police departments. LSU Police can be reached at 388-5331. To reach Southern University, call 771-2770.

Several federal law enforcement agencies have offices in Baton Rouge.

Those agencies include the FBI, Secret Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Bureau and Border Patrol.

Louisiana civil law differences fading over time

Advocate staff report

Civil laws governing property ownership might surprise newcomers to Louisiana, a state which has community property laws.

Once a couple sets up a home, assets acquired through joint effort become part of the couple’s community property.

That means each spouse owns one-half of the assets in the community — including incomes.

But property people bring with them to Louisiana falls under the laws of the states where people come from.

The community property law is one of the last vestiges of Spanish influence in Louisiana law.

Over the years, Louisiana has moved closer to the laws that guide most states.

Louisiana’s civil laws are based on the idea of the state’s primary law giver — the Legislature — writing the laws.

In common-law states, law is made from the accumulation of court decisions over the years. That’s how things evolved in England, and that’s how most of the law in America came about.

Other differences between Louisiana law and other states have faded over time. Lawmakers in Louisiana and their counterparts in other states have changed their laws to incorporate legal concepts from other areas.

Louisiana’s civil code is based partly on the Napoleonic Code, a set of 2,281 articles arranged in three books that was enacted in 1804 over the French empire ruled by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Louisiana’s civil code originally provided a set of family laws that were geared toward protecting the family unit, but many of those laws have changed.

Traditionally, it was harder to obtain a divorce and dissolve a family unit in Louisiana than most other states.

But family law in Louisiana has undergone dramatic change in the past decade to the extent that most vestiges of Napoleonic or civilian law are gone.

One part of family law underwent a complete overhaul a few years ago. Voters threw out the 187-year-old tradition of “forced heirship,” a law unique to the state.

Forced heirship made parents include children in a portion of their wills.

The new law allows parents to leave children out of their wills with two exceptions: Parents cannot disinherit children 23 and younger, and those of any age who can’t care for themselves.
Six full-service hospitals among health-care providers

The Baton Rouge area has six full-service hospitals, two psychiatric hospitals, and several multi-specialty clinics.

The full-service hospitals in East Baton Rouge Parish are:
1. Baton Rouge General Medical Center on Florida Boulevard at Acadian Thruway. The hospital is operated by General Health System, which owns numerous health care companies in this region.
2. Baton Rouge General Health Center on Bluebonnet Boulevard, offers an array of outpatient services, but also provides inpatient care. It is also run by General Health System.
3. Columbia Medical Center on North O’Neal Lane at Interstate 12. Last spring Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp. of Nashville announced it is selling the hospital to Tennessee-based Quorum Health Group Inc.
4. Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, a state public hospital, located on Airline Highway near Greenwell Street.
5. Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, operated by the Catholic Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, on Essen Lane near Interstate 10.
6. Lane Memorial Hospital, a community public hospital on Main Street in Zachary.

Each of these hospitals offers a range of medical, surgical and diagnostic services, community outreach and educational programs that promote wellness. All of the hospitals offer emergency care.

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Medicare: Learn the lingo

By ALISON ASHTON
Copley News Service

Once you turn 65, you’re eligible for Medicare, which many veterans of the red tape say is a bewildering maze of forms, insurance terms and medical jargon. Financial consultant Conni Cash learned just how confusing it could be when her mother’s illness plunged her into the world of Medicare. She learned even more when her father became ill with prostate cancer.

“At least the second time around, I understood the medi-speak, the insurance jargon and the legalese,” she recalls. “But, again, I found an amazing number of things I had to argue with Medicare about and an equally amazing number of things that Medicare didn’t want to pay for. Things like prescriptions and the going rate for specialists.”

Cash may have had it tough, but she’s put her hard-earned knowledge to good use in “The Medicare Answer Book” (Race Point Press). In it, she defines just what Medicare is, how to qualify and how to fill out the forms. She also tackles such topics as Medigap policies, managed care and long-term coverage.

“What you don’t know about Medicare can affect what kind of treatment is received, where it is given and how long it continues,” she warns readers.

First off, she dispels three common misconceptions:
1. Medicare does not pay for long-term care.
2. Continuing coverage for medical care is not unlimited.
3. All doctors do not accept what Medicare considers to be reasonable fees for their services.

Knowing the difference between Medicare, Medigap and Medicaid will help you determine how much and what type of coverage you need.

Medicare is a federally funded health insurance program for people 65 and older. Here’s where it gets tricky: It comes in two parts. Part A covers hospitalization and is free. Part B covers medical expenses, such as doctor’s fees, lab tests and other services not covered by Part A.

Part B covers doctor’s fees, lab tests and other services not covered by Part A, and you don’t have to be a hospital patient. Part A doesn’t cover anything once you qualify (it’s paid for by Social Security payroll taxes), but there is a monthly premium (currently $43.80) for Part B.

Medigap is a type of insurance policy sold by private insurers and designed to fill the many gaps in Medicare Part A and B coverage. You pay for this out of pocket, and since policies vary widely, look them over carefully to make sure you get all the coverage you need and don’t pay for what you don’t need. For example, some include basic drug benefits (a must for anyone who relies on prescription medications) and foreign-travel protection (also necessary if you plan to travel a lot).

Medicaid is a government program aimed at people with limited financial resources.

Unlike Medicare, eligibility for Medicaid is based on financial need,” Cash explains. But since illness often drains financial resources, many elderly Medicare recipients also qualify for Medicaid.

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Strong economy means stable real estate market

By JERRY WALLACE
Real Estate section editor

"We have a good market," says Dan Derbes, president of the Greater Baton Rouge Association of Realtors. "We have a very good market."

Derbes, who brings to his office the slightly different perspective of an appraiser, says the housing market is not only booming but that it is the less expensive homes that are appreciate the most.

"The average price paid for a home in East Baton Rouge Parish April of 1997," he says, "was $158.55. The average price paid in April of this year was $118,910. That's a sizable increase."

"It took place in a period during which building permits were actually a little off." Derbes says this is a very visible market and the board and has been for some time. Statistics are, of course, the building blocks of statements of trends and such concepts as the importance of a particular almanac point out that an important factor in the condition of the real estate market is the number of days a home stays on the market and the number of days a home stays on the market is slightly longer. "Days on the market is a very good market." Derbes points out, "and it was on the market an average of 93 days in January 1998. That's consistent with the rate of appreciation."

All of those figures, by the way, are the very good range. Anything under 90 days on the market is considered excellent by the National Association of Realtors standards.

And, while homes have been on the market a few days longer this year, activity and prices have been high.

Year-to-date figures show 1,827 homes have been sold through April for $210,800,000. In 1997, the comparable figures were 1,627 homes for $174,516,800.

"That's a good sign," Derbes says, "and it's an economic climate that's very favorable for buying homes and for 'move up' purchases. The interest rates remain low and the economy as a whole is fantastic. There are plenty of jobs and, with the proposed construction at nearby plants thrown into the mix, there's a projected shortage of rental housing."

"And all points the same," Derbes says the solid local economy is more important than interest rates even though sudden drops in the prevailing rate will cause a temporary surge in sales.

"Move up" is the driving force behind the current surge. "The good economy is making it easier for apartment dwellers to buy their first home and easier for the people they buy from to move into a bigger or more expensive home.

"Relocation figures are back to what they were in the good old days but 'move up' activity is really more important right now," Derbes says. "More than half of all purchase agreements are contingent on the sale of an existing home," he suggests.

"I'm not seeing a lot of the professional aspects of the industry go, nothing uptakes this year's new agency law that went into effect March 1.

"This is a fundamental change in the way we do business," Derbes says of the new law that literally changes what is represented by a real estate agent showing homes to prospective buyers.

Briefly, rather than being a sub agent of the agent listing the home and a representative of the seller, an agent showing homes is presumed to be an agent of the buyer. There are details that refine this relationship, but the overall effect is a real shift.

"Buyers, of course, like the change when it's described to them," Derbes says, and the GBRAR is spending lots of time and effort training members.

Contrary to the national trend, Derbes says, the local Realtor association is gaining in membership.

"And the new brokers and agents," he says, "are more technically literate and willing to invest in technology."

That's good, since the real estate industry is one of the leading lights in such areas as Internet usage.

The National Association of Realtors' "Real Estate Site" gets 231 million hits per month.

Building levels continue to rise in Baton Rouge

By TED GRIGGS
Associate business writer

Last year, a new mall pumped up construction levels in the Baton Rouge area. This year, commercial construction continues to show strong development, although there's more variety.

In Baton Rouge alone, development has pumped permits for $134.1 million worth of projects during the first four months of the year, a 20 percent increase. Large commercial projects, such as the airport expansion and a new Home Depot, have helped boost the building levels.

Builders have attributed the activity to everything from the sturdy economy and low interest rates to the bull stock market and baby boomers' demand for new services.

Builders have attributed the activity to everything from the sturdy economy and low interest rates to the bull stock market and baby boomers' demand for new services.

In the first four months of 1998, Realtors sold 543 homes in the outlying parishes, compared to 587 last year, Greater Baton Rouge Multiple Listing Service records show.

Still, East Baton Rouge represents the bulk of sales at 1,298 homes, up from 1,150 last year.

The parish has seen home sales rise by nearly 12 percent on the year, East Baton Rouge accounted for 70 percent of homes sold during the first four months of 1998.

The Multiple Listing Service is including East and West Baton Rouge, Ascension, Livingston, East and West Feliciana and Iberville parishes.

Most of the sales in the outlying parishes took place in Ascension and Livingston.

Livingston and Ascension are among the state's fastest-growing parishes. Much of the growth comes from people moving from Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

Ascension's population balloon, however, from 70,328 in mid-1997, U.S. Census Bureau records show. That's an increase of nearly 21 percent.

Commercial activity has had a similar increase. These days, both parishes are watching commercial growth follow the population.

Three new hotels are under way in Denham Springs. Wal-Mart has announced plans to build a Super Wal-Mart in Walker; just five miles from a similar store in Denham Springs.

Having two Wal-Marts within five miles of each other is indicative of strong growth," said Skip Smart, executive director of the Livingston Parish Economic Development Council.

The combination of a good education system, access to markets, labor supply, and for the time being, affordable housing, makes an attractive package for residential, business and industrial growth, Smart said.

Ascension could say the same.

The parish government issued 102 commercial permits last year, compared to 74 a year earlier.

During the first quarter, the parish issued 18 commercial permits.

Meanwhile, investors, including large Real Estate Investment Trusts, are also looking to capitalize on the area's booming economy. In May, HSA Read, a Chicago real estate firm, paid $4.1 million for Service Merchandise Corp.'s Port Allen distribution center.

Commercial Realtor Beau Box of Latter & Blum said industrial investors have taken a look at the area, and now some have begun to deal.

With labor, material and land prices rising, buying an existing warehouse or office is usually cheaper than building something new, said Mike Falgoust of Sealy & Falgoust Real Estate.

Many people who invested in properties a few years ago are ready to cash in, Falgoust said. And these days, it's a seller's market.

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Finding a place to worship is not difficult in Baton Rouge. The city has places of worship for almost every denomination.

All the major Christian denominations are represented — Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Baptist, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran. Smaller denominations, such as Quakers, and non-denominational, interdenominational and independent groups also have congregations here.

There are several African-American churches, including the Mt. Zion First Baptist Church on East Boulevard, Shiloh Baptist Church on Eddie Robinson Sr. Drive, Neely United Methodist Church on Thomas H. Deloitt Drive and Greater King David Baptist Church on Blount Road.

The international flavor of Baton Rouge is represented by several services conducted in foreign languages, including Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Hearing services signed for people who are deaf are also available.

Baton Rouge has the state’s only independent deaf church, the First Baptist Deaf Church, located on Brightside Lane near the Louisiana School for the Deaf.

In addition, the Catholic Deaf Center on Brightside Lane conducts services for the hearing impaired. Other churches have interpreters for the deaf during hearing services.

Congregations are becoming more aware of the needs of their physically challenged worshippers and are making appropriate accommodations for them, including large-print pew materials, hearing devices and shortened pews for wheelchair occupants.

Two mainline Jewish congregations and a Messianic congregation call Baton Rouge home. Bahai’s, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims also have places of worship.

The Jimmy Swaggart Ministries holds services at its Bluebonnet Drive complex.

Those looking for a mega-church might choose Bethany World Prayer Center at 1355 Plank Road in Baker.

If a smaller congregation is more appealing, that’s possible too. Some are so small they meet in homes.

Baton Rougeans don’t just worship together. They’re also actively involved with mission projects. People of different faiths frequently join together for interdenominational efforts.

For example, the Greater Baton Rouge Federation of Churches and Synagogues was instrumental in starting a Habitat for Humanity chapter. Plus, the Federation’s Helpers for Housing program that works on elderly people’s homes is quite active.

First Baptist has a weekly Bible study with meals on Tuesdays at 11:40 a.m. and First United Methodist has First Monday, which includes vocal and instrumental presentations plus a meal the first of each month.

Lenten meals are served by St. James Episcopal on Fridays during that part of the year.

Churches have become known for special presentations during the year. Zachary First Baptist runs out of tickets for its Christmas program almost as soon as the tickets are offered.

And Istrouma Baptist Church has become equally known for its living Christmas tree.

Built in 1853, St. Joseph’s Cathedral, downtown at Fourth and Main streets, is the oldest church in Baton Rouge.

The Scripture about seeking and finding is undoubtedly valid here.
BR economy continues to skyrocket

By TOM GUARISCO
Advocate business writer

Like a bulky freight train that takes forever to stop, the Baton Rouge economy continues to add jobs after a record 10 straight years of job growth. All private sectors of the local economy are still growing, adding 9,100 jobs during the 12 months which ended in April, the latest figures available. However, government jobs shrank by 100 during that time.

The local economy has been expanding since 1987, and has set records every year since then. The local nonfarm work force now stands at 289,400, which includes East and West Baton Rouge, Ascension and Livingston parishes. In the past year the work force has grown 3.3 percent.

The Baton Rouge area has added more than $2 billion nonfarm jobs since bottoming in 1987, amid Louisiana's oil bust. As in recent years, Baton Rouge accounted for a fourth of all the new jobs in the state, even though there are eight metro areas.

Through April, Louisiana added 41,000 jobs to the work force, a growth rate of 2.3 percent. The state work force now stands at 1.9 million.

In Baton Rouge the heart of the economy is manufacturing, with 24,800 jobs. Those workers are employed at the many chemical and petrochemical plants along the river. However, state Labor Department figures show that manufacturing jobs grew less lucrative during the past year. The average hourly wage for all manufacturing workers was $17.69 last April, compared with $16.17 this year.

Although fewer people work in the sector than in the heady 1970s and 1980s of the oil and gas boom, manufacturing employment is still the vital core of the local economy. Plants have been cutting back for some years now to compete, so Baton Rouge to show gains in manufacturing employment shows the strength of the local sector, LSU economist Loren Scott said.

Through April Baton Rouge added 600 manufacturing jobs, a 3.4 percent increase. Although overall manufacturing sector pay has dropped, one segment of manufacturing — chemicals — is in a bold expansion right now, Scott said. Some $4 billion in higher-than-usual plan improvements and expansions are on the drawing boards or already underway, Scott said.

"The chemical industry is a very significant part of the economy," said Scott. Statewide wages at chemical plants were $21.87 an hour in April, up from $21.03 a year earlier.

The other key element of the state's economic prosperity is the

See Skyrocket, Page 41

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Mall of Louisiana, Cortana boost area economy

By ELIZABETH SPENCE
Advocate Staff Writer

The opening of the Mall of Louisiana in October of 1997 made Baton Rouge the home of the two largest enclosed malls in Louisiana. The new mall brought in 120 specialty shops, along with its five anchor stores — Dillard's, JCPenney, Maison Blanche, McRae's and Sears.

It also brought in business from outside the city limits where the Mall of Louisiana is located. Spending in that area jumped 26.1 percent during the first three months, while it dropped 6 percent inside the city.

Both the increase in revenues and redistribution of spending suggest the new mall is attracting shoppers from outside the parish, LSU economist Loren Scott said.

Mall of Louisiana Manager Todd Benton said initial research showed many Baton Rouge residents were traveling as far as New Orleans and Houston to buy from their favorite retail stores.

"We tracked the retail dollars leaving Baton Rouge," he explained. "Then we tried to combine all of the stores people were looking for in one place."

Benton said the new mall, which is located at Bluebonnet and I-10, draws customers from as far away as Metairie and New Orleans but its strongest out-of-parish draw is from Ascension.

Some of the Mall of Louisiana's major apparel stores are Abercrombie & Fitch, American Eagle Outfitters, Ann Taylor, August Max, Banana Republic, Buckle, Casual Corner, Eddie Bauer, Express, S-7-9, Gap, Georgine, Hudson Bay, J Riggs, JoS A. Bank Clothiers, Structure, Lane Bryant, Laura Ashley, Lerner New York, Limited, Northern Reflections, Paul Harris, Petite Sophisticate, Rave, Talbots Petites, Victoria's Secret and Wilson's The Leather Expert.

Besides acquiring some of the prime retail attractions of New Orleans, the Mall of Louisiana also picked up some of the Crescent City's atmospheric charm. It offers live music, strolling entertainers and a balloon clown. It has a classic carousel as a centerpiece for its food court. It has lots of comfortable seating and it has expansive skylights.

Meanwhile, the Mall at Cortana, which has been serving Baton Rouge for the past 20 years, continues to pull customers from North and Central Baton Rouge, Baker and Denham Springs, Cortana Marketing Director Kenneth Taylor said.

Cortana's convenient location is easily accessible from I-10, I-12, Airline Highway and Florida Boulevard, which makes it one of the most successful shopping centers in America, Taylor said.

It is regularly listed among the nation's top ten malls in sales per square foot, and it continually updates its services, he added. For instance, one of the mall's newest features is Cortana Land, a kid's play area designed to look like the Louisiana bayou — complete with simulated swamp water and alligators.

Throughout the year, Cortana offers free concerts, antique and collectible shows, art exhibits, craft shows and information fairs. It caters to children with the Cortana Kids Club and summer camp. And it serves families with rooms for mothers to nurse and change their children.

The Mall at Cortana has six anchor stores: Dillard's, JCPenney, Maison Blanche, Sears, Mervyn's and Service Merchandise.

Among its 140 specialty shops and restaurants, Cortana's major retailers include The Gap, Gap Kids, Eddie Bauer, The Disney Store, Lee Michael's Fine Jewelry and The Limited; and its principal restaurants are Piccadilly Cafeteria, Ruby Tuesday and Chick-fil-A.

The Cortana shopping district expands beyond the mall to include retailers such as Old Navy, Just For Feet, Wal-Mart, Babies 'R Us, Computer City, Lowe's, Books-A-Million, Party City and Office Max. The Cortana shopping district includes Bennigan's, El Chico and the Roadhouse Grill.

Cortana's lineup of stores has made the area a magnet to national retailers, Taylor said.
Chemical industry drives BR economy

Work force turnover progresses locally

By RANDY McCLAIN
Advocate business writer

The chemical industry stands out as one of the biggest engines driving the Baton Rouge area economy, and that engine is going through a major change in employment.

As many as 15,000 chemical industry workers, many hired in the 1960s, will retire in the next five years, and the industry is hungry to replace them with younger employees.

“We’ve already seen the beginnings of that,” said Bettie Baker, a spokesperson for the Louisiana Chemical Association. “In the last six months, Exxon has hired 75 people and started their training.”

Baker said the chemical industry is in the midst of a two-year boom, and many companies are adding plant capacity or bringing in new product lines to take advantage of a robust national economy.

Louisiana is benefiting. In fact, Louisiana ships the second-largest volume of chemicals behind only the state of Texas, officials said.

The total value of shipments of Louisiana-produced chemicals was $24.8 billion in 1995, according to the latest breakdown of figures available from state sources.

The chemical industry also employs a large work force and pays wages higher than average for the state’s manufacturing sector.

Average gross weekly pay in Baton Rouge in the chemical/ refining industry during April was $1,054, based on an average 48-hour work week, compared to $642 for a 43-hour week in overall manufacturing employment, state figures show. The figures include overtime pay.

Combined, the chemical and petroleum refining industries employ 11,900 area workers in April in East and West Baton Rouge, Ascension and Livingston parishes, according to state labor figures.

Jobs in the chemical industry statewide are concentrated in the Baton Rouge to New Orleans Mississippi River corridor and around Lake Charles.

Louisiana primarily produces bulk chemicals rather than specialty chemicals.

Bulk chemicals typically are shipped to plants elsewhere to be transformed into consumer products. State and local economic development agencies are working to recruit manufacturers to make more products in Louisiana from bulk chemicals produced here.
Museums, galleries highlight strong art community

By ANNE PRICE
Advocate staff writer

Baton Rouge is home to a number of accomplished visual artists, both amateur and professional, and several venues where their work is on public display.

Galleries, museums and frame shops with print and paint displays and occasional special shows, all are places that contemporary art to Baton Rouge on a daily basis.

A new Arts District in downtown Baton Rouge has recently opened, "Phantom Galleries," claiming art exhibits in display windows of cooperating merchants and property owners. These range from showings of student art to special exhibits from professional galleries and organizations.

More arts activity comes from a new working studio for professional artists at 901 North St.

Fourteen artists are working in the spacious, attractive restored historic building. Plans for the future are to hold open houses, present special exhibits and tours and conduct classes as the program develops.

Ingomar would be another gallery, 803 Main St., 208-510, is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, offering coffee and conversation as well as art exhibits.

Young and emerging artists, including students, dominate the exhibitions and entertainment, including music, poetry readings and video is often presented.

In addition to galleries and shops with regular exhibits, many businesses are featuring art displays to entertain their customers, and downtown businesses are beginning to cooperate ventures with artists to display their work.

Several beauty spots, such as The Gallery on the Bogue Chitto and Rigby & Frederick salon, 7250 Perkins Rd., have regular displays.

Fredrickson's, himself a sculptor and his work is on view in the local restaurants often show the work of contemporary area artists in their dining rooms.

But serious art fans will want to explore the museums and galleries throughout the area.

Two major galleries are operated in cooperation with Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission (BRRC) and are located in park facilities.

Baton Rouge Gallery in City Park Clubhouse, accessible via entrance off Airline Highway, is the city's only professional nonprofit gallery. The gallery has operated for more than a quarter of a century and artist members are chosen by peer review.

Changing exhibitions are open to the public without charge from noon to 6 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday.

The gallery also sponsors a variety of multi-disciplinary programs. "Sundays at 700" series presents poetry and fiction readings, musical and dramatic performances, also free to the public, a "Sundays at 700" series offers more ambitious productions, sometimes with a small admission charge. For information, call 383-1470.

Louisiana Art and Artists' Guild accepts student, amateur and professional members, and sponsors a variety of exhibitions, including at least one or two all-member shows open to all members. This policy has proved a successful training ground for many of the area's working artists.

BREC is also partially supporting this gallery, which now occupies space at the Jefferson Highway Park, telephone 929-4677.

The Louisiana Arts and Science Center operates the LASC Riverside Museum, 100 S. River Rd., which combines changing exhibitions, sculpture on permanent loan, and classes and activities for young people, including the Challenger Space Center. Discovery Depot for children, and a hands-on science center. Admission charged, 344-5727.

The Old State Capitol, 100 N. Blvd., just across the street from LASC, is a museum of political history with a variety of exhibits and occasional special shows. The building itself is an architectural and historical treasure. Admission charged, 342-0500.

The Louisiana State Archives, 3851 Essen Lane, 774-5060, has changing exhibitions as well as permanent display of historic documents and objects, free to the public.

LSU and Southern University offer visual art exhibits throughout the year. The LSU Museum of Art, 388-4003, located in Memorial Tower in the middle of campus, has changing exhibits plus remarkable permanent displays of decorative art and furniture.

The LSU Union Art Gallery, 388-5117, has year-round changing exhibitions, as does the School of Art Gallery, 388-5402, located in Foster Hall, which also houses the LSU Museum of Natural Science.

Memorial Library often has special exhibitions as well.

The LSU Rural Life Museum, 4900 Essen Lane at 410, 765-2357, is a 25-building rural life historical complex, with more than 200 collections of art and artifacts from the 19th century. Admission is charged.

Louisiana State University's art gallery, 771-2070, is located in Hayden Hall, the fine arts building on campus, and occasional special exhibits are mounted in the areas on campus, such as the Student Union.

All facilities on both campuses are free and open to the public.

A quick trip across the I-10 bridge to Port Allen takes you to the West Baton Rouge Museum, 845 N. Jefferson, 336-2422. Permanent historical displays plus changing exhibits are free to the public.

The West Baton Rouge Museum, 840 N. Alexander Ave., also shows art exhibits on occasion. Commercial galleries, such as Taylor Clark Gallery, 943 Government St., and Gilley's Gallery, 8750 Florida Blvd., always have art on view, with occasional special exhibitions. Taylor Clark specializes in antique prints, classic work and fine contemporary art, and Gilley's is known for its outstanding folk art.

Caffery Gallery, 401 Government St., 388-9397, is a gift shop with a gallery included, and regular theme shows which feature some of the city's best professional artists as well as visiting artists.

Art craft shops with special shows include the Crafts Gallery in Village Square, 928-1810, Cottage & Garden, 2235 Hollywood Ave., 333-9525 and Interior Market Gallery, 3655 Perkins Road, 343-3655. Many frame shops have continuous showings of prints and paintings, as well as special exhibits from time to time.

Capital Camera, 401 Government St., 388-9397, presents changing exhibits of fine art photography by both local and visiting artists. The work is displayed in a special gallery room from the shop's area of the building, and is free and open to the public.

Hammond and Lafayette boast numerous galleries, including those at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette and Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond.

These are just some highlights of the visual arts in and around Baton Rouge.

For a detailed listing, see the weekly list of art galleries and museums in the Advocate Magazine.

The Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge, 427 Laurel St., 344-8558, hosts occasional art shows and maintains a listing of galleries and museums and their arts in education program.

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Ascension Parish: Charming community on the rise

River parishes bureau

New subdivisions, schools, businesses and industrial expansions may be changing the landscape of Ascension Parish, but the community retains the charm of its moss laden bayou and graceful antebellum homes.

Located south of East Baton Rouge Parish, Ascension Parish had an estimated population of 70,229 as of July 1, 1997, according to the state's projected population figures.

A big factor in the population growth is the parish's public school system, which in the past few years underwent $22.5 million in school renovations and new school construction.

The school system had 14,554 students enrolled for the 1997-98 school year at 17 primary and middle schools and three high schools. School officials are planning to build a new high school, the parish's fourth, in the Dutchtown area.

Teacher salaries are boosted by a 21 percent property tax approved by voters in 1995 and the parish's average full-time public school teacher's salaries ranked 11th among the state's 66 public school districts for the 1996-97 school year.

The school system has received state and national recognition for its many innovative programs, including literacy and deaf education programs, the parish's chapter of the Louisiana Alliance for Education Reform, its Goals 2000 efforts, and the Expansion Fund program for educational projects.

Other educational institutions, like the state-approved and accredited Ascension Technical Institute in Sorrento, offer training in welding, drafting, nursing, office work and other technical fields.

Parish President Tommy Martinez and the Parish Council have been studying implementing a parish water and sewer services and zoning. The parish also has been actively improving rural roads and bridges.

The banks of the Mississippi River, which cuts through the parish, provide industries with an ideal location.

Most of the petro-chemical plants are located in Geismar and many are in the midst of major expansions.

The impact of those expansions is reflected in the 30 percent increase in sales and use tax collections in the parish in the first three months of 1998 from the same period in 1997, according to parish sales and use tax authority.

Gonzales' booming economy is reflected in its city sales and use tax revenues, which increased from $4.4 million in 1996 to $4.85 million in 1997, according to parish sales and use tax authority.

The City of Gonzales in 1997 issued 41 residential building permits for a total value of $2.78 million and 23 commercial building permits for a total value of $10.8 million.

The combined $13.5 million worth of new construction in 1997 was a huge increase from the $9.9 million worth of construction on the 32 residential and 21 commercial building permits issued in 1996.

Much of the new commercial activity in Gonzales was in the retail area with the building of the Albertson's supermarket, the addition to the Wal-Mart store, and the new skating rink.

The parish's third municipality, the Town of Sorrento, is on the parish's east bank and has an estimated 1997 population of 1,329.

The state runs Louisiana Regional Airport, a general aviation airport a few miles south of Gonzales off La. 44. The airport boasts a 4,000-foot runway, 25 hangars and 21 ties-downs.

Tapping into the tourism industry is the Tangier Factory Outlet at I-10 and La. 30, a member of Louisiana's Tax-Free Shopping Program for international visitors.

Festivals such as the Jambalaya Festival in Gonzales, the Boucherie Festival in Sorrento and the Sunshine Festival in Donaldsonville preserve family and cultural traditions.

Livingston continues growing trend

Florida parishes bureau

Livingston Parish, just east of Baton Rouge on Interstate 12, is rural in character, but developing urban amenities as commuters move into subdivisions.

The parish was created in 1832 when the Louisiana Legislature split the St. Helena District. The new parish was named for Edward Livingston, a U.S. senator from Louisiana.

Livingston Parish's population almost hits 80,000. It has eight incorporated municipalities: Albany, Denham Springs, French Settlement, Killian, Livingston, Port Vincent, Springfield, and Walker.

The parish is embarking on a major road resurfacing program that will cost $28.5 million and be funded by an additional sales tax passed last year.

In the rural areas, there are two multi-million-dollar projects under construction, a $250 million high-tech observatory and a $7 million state park.

The observatory is being built near the town of Livingston. The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory is funded by the National Science Foundation.

LIGO will work with the California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The facility will have between 30 and 35 employees.

The observatory is intended to detect gravitational waves.

Scientists hope that LIGO will be the first detector sensitive enough to prove these waves exist. Albert Einstein predicted their existence, but none has been detected.

The Tickfaw State Park also is expected to have an economic impact on the parish. The park is the first in the country dedicated to ecotourism and education.

The parish has had a president-council form of government since January 1996.

Livingston Parish has 15 elementary schools, 11 junior high schools and nine senior high schools. All parish high schools have college preparatory vocational enrichment courses.

The special education department includes physical and occupational therapists, paraprofessionals working with speech therpaists and teachers for students classified as gifted.

Other public services include a Council on Aging, the Youth Services Bureau and a library system.

Denham Springs is the largest town in the parish with a population of about 9,000. It is a brief drive from Baton Rouge on Interstate 12 or U.S. 190.

Denham Springs, which celebrated its 95th anniversary this year, has an antiques village in the old downtown area where a festival is held each spring.

Train Station Park, a one-acre park at the corner of North Range and Railroad avenues sits on the edge of the antiques village.

The Livingston Chamber of Commerce, which is located on Government Drive next to City Hall, has information on businesses, demographics and services in the area. The telephone number is 665-8155.

Municipal water, natural gas, sewer and trash service are available by calling 665-3540.

Automobile registration and re-registration can be conducted at the motor vehicles office on U.S. 190 just east of the city.

The Denham Springs Police Department phone number is 665-5106. Fire Chief Robert Wasmus is at 665-2251.
Westside’s story

Advocate file photo
More than 20 million tons of cargo pass through the Port Allen Locks each year.

West Baton Rouge Parish offers jobs, family atmosphere

Advocate staff report

Job opportunities and a small-town setting near Louisiana’s capital city continue to attract people to the westside parishes.

The Westside offers job opportunities in its industrial plants and businesses, yet its rural setting is conducive to stable family life.

Pointe Coupee Parish is trying to attract outside money and development with its Multi-use Center, an arena designed to hold everything from rodeos and livestock shows to antique sales and music festivals.

The center has already booked events months in advance and is drawing horse enthusiasts from throughout the region. These events pump money into the local economy and have helped inspire a developer to build a mid-sized, mid-priced motel in New Roads.

The motel will allow the center to book even larger and longer events, organizers say, and would be another selling point when it comes to promoting the parish’s tourist industry.

The Mississippi is probably the most important asset in the development of West Baton Rouge Parish. Through the years the southern, western and northern boundaries of the parish have changed several times, but the eastern boundary has always been the Mississippi.

The parish has an excellent transportation system with three major highways - Interstate 10, U.S. 190, and La. 1 - as well as the Union Pacific Railroad.

Additionally, the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport is only minutes away. The country’s fifth largest port, the deepwater Port of Greater Baton Rouge, is headquartered in West Baton Rouge Parish.

Within its jurisdiction, the port handles more than 78 million tons of goods and commodities annually, ranging from grain and foodstuffs to paper products, chemicals, manufactured goods, bulk ores and petroleum products.

In addition, a general purpose Foreign-Trade Zone makes the parish a center of international commerce.

Just south of the port, the Port Allen Locks service more than 27,000 barges carrying more than 20 million tons of cargo each year. The lock provides barges with water access to and from Texas on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway via Morgan City.

In its 203 square miles, West Baton Rouge Parish combines agriculture and industry for a stable, well-rounded economic base.

Westside farmers produce sugar cane, cotton, soybeans, garden vegetables, dairy products and livestock.

Meanwhile, its convenient location attracts many national companies including Cargill, Inc.; Castrol Community Coffee Co., Inc.; Borden Chemical and Plastics; Dow Chemical Co.; DSM Copolymer; Exxon Company, U.S.A.; International Piping Systems; Placid Refining; United Parcel Service (UPS), Wal-Mart, and many others.

Three full-service industrial parks - Metro-West, Sun Plus, and Westport - are available for new business locations.

The Parish Council functions as the parish’s legislative body, while the Parish President serves as the administrator, overseeing the operations of the parish.

The parish has three incorporated municipalities - Addis, Brusly, and Port Allen - each with an elected mayor and board of alderman. Port Allen is the parish seat.

The population of West Baton Rouge is about 20,000 and is about evenly divided between urban and rural residents.

Port Allen was named after Henry Watkins Allen, Civil War governor of Louisiana. Chartered in 1916, Port Allen celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1991.

As a part of the Baton Rouge metropolitan area, the city has a population of 6,277 and continues to expand its municipal services and facilities in order to keep pace with its growing population.

The population of West Baton Rouge was originally part of the county of Baton Rouge which was established in 1807. In 1810, after the Florida Rebellion, the county of Baton Rouge divided into two parishes - East Baton Rouge and West Baton Rouge - with the river separating the two.

Iberville Parish offers plenty history, folklore

Advocate staff report

Historic Iberville Parish, located just south of Baton Rouge, blends scenic pasture and farmland with distinctive folklore, legends and Cajun culture.

It is the home of the International Acadian Festival, which annually celebrates the arrival of the Acadians.

Founded in 1699 by Pierre LeMoyne Sieur D'Iberville at Bayou Goula, the parish extends south to White Castle, east to St. Gabriel and north to the seat of Plaquemines and north to the villages of Grosse Tete, Rosedale and Mgruingon.

Enter Sportsman’s Paradise by driving west on La. 75 to the fishing villages of Bayou Sorrel and Bayou Pigeon where public boat ramps provide access to the Atchafalaya Basin.

The bayous and the river have always played an important part in commerce and transportation of the parish.

The historic Plaquemine Lock with its pavilion and overlook is a favorite spot for tourists. The lock, completed in 1909 and operated until the mid-1960’s, now serves as a museum.

Daily tours are offered at the Old Homes of Turnerville, which are within walking distance from the Plaquemine Lock, and at Dow USA’s Louisiana Division, the state’s largest petrochemical facility.

More than 50 basic bulk chemicals are produced at Dow, where tours are available by calling 353-6623. Call 677-9337 for information on the Turnerville tours.

The Plaquemine Ferry is a favorite for those wanting to experience the Mississippi River. Its riders travel from Plaquemine to the eastern part of the parish, home of historic structures, including Bartheil’s Grocer, St. Gabriel Catholic Church, a national registry property, and the massive facilities of the Gillis Long Hansen’s Disease Center, another national registry property.

The historic Lockwood’s Plantation is a favorite spot for tourists. The park, located on La. 1, just north of the historic Plantation at White Castle, is located on the historic home of the Lockwood family.

Travel along the Iberville’s La. 77 to the villages of Grosse Tete, Rosedale and Mgruingon to find antique shops and eateries.

Midway Grocery, featuring many Louisiana culinary favorites, is located just off I-10 Exit 179. It is Laissez Vals plantation where the fifth largest oak tree in the country stands.

For more information or a free brochure, contact the Iberville Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 248, Plaquemine, LA 70765-0248 or call (903) 633-8500.

Cajuns’ home a dive away in Lafayette

Acadian Bureau

LAFAYETTE - Cajuns call this place home.

It's the hub of Acadiana and the starting point for tourists who are interested in experiencing the three main ingredients of Cajun culture: good food, good people and good times - all on only an hour west of Baton Rouge.

The drive to Lafayette from Baton Rouge is easy. It's a main route, Interstate 10 crosses the northern portion of the Atchafalaya Basin, the nation's largest river-basin swamp.

A large stretch of the four-lane highway is elevated across the massive expanse of wetland, offering breathtaking views.

Local area events include the city's Festivals Acadiens and the Louisiana Swamp Festival, the Rayne Frog Festival, Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival, Gueydan Duck Festival, Louisiana Sugar Cane Festival and New Iberia, Louisiana Rice Festival in Crowley. Shrimp and Petroleum Festival in Morgan City and the Louisiana Cotton Festival in Ville Platte.

Restaurants worth mentioning can be found in Lafayette, and in Carencro, Henderson, Breaux Bridge, New Iberia and Abbeville.

Local area offers of recreation include three municipal swimming pools, several golf courses, a planetarium, more than two dozen parks, a zoo, museums and more than three dozen public tennis courts.

Several of Lafayette's Acadian Villages are replicas of 19th-century Cajun communities, which is open to visitors year-round.

At Vermilionville, a Cajun and Creole heritage park, visitors will experience life as it was in the early years of Cajun and Creole culture.

Lafayette's Cajun Country offers a variety of entertainment opportunities, including semi-pro ice hockey and conventions.

The University of Southwestern Louisiana offers a wide curriculum for its 14,000 students. The university has gained a reputation for its instruction in petroleum and agriculture.

It is also being recognized for its Productivity Center, its Marine Survival Training Center and the National Wetlands Research Center.

More than 400 schools, both public and private, are found in Lafayette, including schools for instruction in business or vocational-technical training and for the mentally handicapped.

The oil and gas business in Louisiana has developed a comprehensive training facility in Lafayette for the visually impaired.

The Lafayette Regional Airport has undergone major renovations to make its facilities more comfortable and efficient for its customers.

If you would like more information on the sights and attractions of Lafayette and Acadiana, call the Lafayette Parish Convention and Visitors Commission at (318) 232-3737.
Newcomers find Zachary friendly

By JAMES MINTON
Baker-Zachary bureau

ZACHARY — Neighborhood schools, affordable housing, employment opportunities and access to transportation arteries continue to attract newcomers to this bustling city north of Baton Rouge.

New homes under construction dot many new subdivisions, while the city's boundaries expand with continuing annexation requests from established residents living on the city's outskirts.

The city also is seeing a continuous commercial construction boom.

Zachary's population, which nearly doubled between 1970 and 1990, was estimated at 23,845 in 1998 by Louisiana Tech University, according to the city's Chamber of Commerce.

Zachary residents are eligible for most of the services provided by the city-parish government but enjoy the added benefits of local police and fire protection, street maintenance, local ambulance service, concentrated business clusters, cultural and recreational activities and utility services.

The city operates under a home rule charter with a mayor, five at-large City Council members and an elected police chief. The city also has a municipal court with an elected judge.

The police department has 29 full-time officers and 12 reserve officers. It operates a segment of the city-parish's enhanced 911 emergency communications network.

The fire department, which includes 17 full-time and 40 volunteer firefighters, includes paramedics, arson investigators and fire prevention officers. The city has a Class 3 fire insurance rating inside the city limits and Class 5 in the protected area surrounding Zachary.

The fire department operates from spacious new headquarters on Main Street across from the Police-Bail Court building.

Zachary High School, Northwestern Middle School and Zachary and Northwestern Elementary schools are all located within the city limits.

Lane Memorial Hospital, which serves northern East Baton Rouge Parish, is located in Zachary, and offers highly-specialized medical treatment, day surgery, a fully-equipped emergency room and an obstetrics unit.

Information on natural gas, water, sewerage, garbage collection and recycling services is available by calling 654-6871.

Electricity is supplied by Dixie Electric Membership Corp. (654-3935) and Entergy Corp. To request GSU service, call 1-800-822-0000.

Power outages on Entergy's system may be reported by calling 1-800-395-4478.

The Zachary Newcomers Club was formed in 1984 to provide a medium by which new families may become better acclimated to Zachary and the surrounding community. Information on the club may be obtained by writing to P.O. Box 1262, Zachary, La. 70791, or calling the Chamber of Commerce at 654-6777.

The Chamber of Commerce's offices are on Main Street, across from City Hall.

The Historic Village, located in the block behind City Hall, includes the McHugh House Museum and Cultural Center, the Allison Agricultural and Rural Life Center and Miss Sis' Magic House, a children's science museum.

The Historic Village, library, BREC and city of Zachary offer a variety of recreational and educational activities for children during the summer.

The city also continues to develop a recreational complex for baseball, softball, football and soccer leagues at a new park on Mount Pleasant Road.

Baker offers country lifestyle with city convenience

By JAMES MINTON
Baker-Zachary bureau

BAKER — East Baton Rouge Parish's second-largest municipality offers its residents urban conveniences close to suburban neighborhoods.

Deriving its name from Baker Plantation, the community became a railroad stop in the 1860s and got its first post office in 1888.

Incorporated in 1945, the city now operates under a home rule charter with a mayor, five City Council members elected from single-member districts and an elected police chief.

Baker also has a municipal court with an elected judge.

Baker's population topped 13,000 in the 1990 census. Its city limits extend from the industrial area north of Interstate 110 to the southern edge of Zachary's corporate limits.

To introduce newcomers to the community, the city and Chamber of Commerce distribute "welcome packets" of information on local services and businesses when new residents apply for utility services at City Hall.

The packets include coupons for discounts at Baker businesses.

The Baker City Hall and Municipal Auditorium are located at 3325 Groom Road, across from the Baker High School. The Baker Police Department and City Court are located in the same block, along with a BREC recreation center, Council on Aging Senior Center, a municipal park and Chamber of Commerce office.

The main routes to Baton Rouge are Plank Road and La. 19, both of which provide interstate access. Shopping centers and other business areas line both routes.

Police protection is provided by a 30-member department supported by a 25-member reserve force.

The department also staffs an answering point for the parish's 911 emergency communications network.

The fire department, with 15 full-time firefighters and a large volunteer force, is well-equipped for responding to fires and medical emergencies. The city has an enviable Class 3 fire insurance rating.

The city provides water, natural gas, sewerage, garbage collection and recycling services. To inquire about service, call 775-9952.

Electricity is supplied by Dixie Electric Membership Corp. (654-3935) and Entergy Corp. to the Gulf States Utilities Co. division. To request GSU service, call 1-800-822-0000.

Power outages on Entergy's system may be reported by calling 1-800-395-4478.

Baker's attractions include the Heritage Museum on Main Street, a general history museum that includes a small village depicting small-town life at the turn of the century.

The city maintains a fishing pond off Groom Road west of La. 19, the Charles Heine Memorial Park along La. 19, BREC parks are located throughout the city.

Nearby are Greenwood Park, the W.W. Dumas Memorial Golf Course, the Greater Baton Rouge Zoo and Cohn Arboretum.

The East Baton Rouge Parish Library's Baker branch is at 4761 Groom Road.

The Baker Little Theater, 3121 Van Buren Drive, is well-known in the area for its series of productions each year.

The Advocate has a news bureau at 3262 Baker Blvd. serving Baker, Zachary and East and West Feliciana parishes.

Schools include Baker High, Baker Middle School, and Bakerfield, Baker Heights, Bask Ridge and St. Isidore elementary schools.

Bathany World Prayer Center on Plank Road also operates Bathany Christian School.

For the convenience of area residents, the state Office of Motor Vehicles has a branch office at 2250 Main St. (771-6203), where the parish Registrar of Voters also has a branch office.

The parish Clerk of Court has a branch office in the Baker City Court building (Municipal Annex) and 1320 Alabama Ave.

Lanell Memorial Hospital, a 107-bed general health care facility in Zachary, is the nearest hospital.

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 detergent activities for children during the summer.

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Berks offers country lifestyle with city convenience

By JAMES MINTON
Baker-Zachary bureau

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The city provides water, natural gas, sewerage, garbage collection and recycling services. To inquire about service, call 775-9952.

Electricity is supplied by Dixie Electric Membership Corp. (654-3935) and Entergy Corp. to the Gulf States Utilities Co. division. To request GSU service, call 1-800-822-0000.

Power outages on Entergy's system may be reported by calling 1-800-395-4478.

Baker's attractions include the Heritage Museum on Main Street, a general history museum that includes a small village depicting small-town life at the turn of the century.

The city maintains a fishing pond off Groom Road west of La. 19, the Charles Heine Memorial Park along La. 19, BREC parks are located throughout the city.

Nearby are Greenwood Park, the W.W. Dumas Memorial Golf Course, the Greater Baton Rouge Zoo and Cohn Arboretum.

The East Baton Rouge Parish Library's Baker branch is at 4761 Groom Road.

The Baker Little Theater, 3121 Van Buren Drive, is well-known in the area for its series of productions each year.

The Advocate has a news bureau at 3262 Baker Blvd. serving Baker, Zachary and East and West Feliciana parishes.

Schools include Baker High, Baker Middle School, and Bakerfield, Baker Heights, Bask Ridge and St. Isidore elementary schools.

Bathany World Prayer Center on Plank Road also operates Bathany Christian School.

For the convenience of area residents, the state Office of Motor Vehicles has a branch office at 2250 Main St. (771-6203), where the parish Registrar of Voters also has a branch office.

The parish Clerk of Court has a branch office in the Baker City Court building (Municipal Annex) and 1320 Alabama Ave.

Lanell Memorial Hospital, a 107-bed general health care facility in Zachary, is the nearest hospital.