BIG PLANS FOR JABOT

A $225 Million Recording Complex and Theme Park In St. Landry Parish

JABOT PRODUCTIONS IN OPELOUSAS IS EITHER the best kept secret in Acadiana or an elaborate pipe dream that has a lot of reputable people fooled. Those few who are knowledgeable about the operation fear that the company will be a burden for the area bringing in tourism dollars and creating jobs by the thousands. But there are also plenty of questions about the project and immediate results for completion are vague.

Jabot's owner, Catherine Doucet, operates a group with ambitious and imaginative ideas. She plans to build a $225 million theme park/recording studio 15 miles north of Opelousas to attract tourists and nickel from around the country. It is expected to employ 1,000 people. Specific details are not available as are dates and timetables.

Jabot's press releases describe the project as "a slice of the arts, multimedia production facility, a major theme park with water rides and attractions that will be the best of the Cajun and New Orleans cultures, extensive recreation areas, including golf courses, theme hotels, executive housing, dining facilities and retailers of Cajuns buyou life and the Port of New Orleans." The project is expected to be a huge hit and it has raised more than a few eyebrows in tight-knit St. Landry Parish.

"People were skeptical about it," admits Castle Anderson, who handles public relations for Jabot. "Anywhere this would have been proposed, there would have been skepticism." Up until now, very little has been known about Jabot or Doucet, president and chief executive officer. There is also suspicion, however, that Doucet is the driving force behind the venture. Says Anderson, "This is her project. She will get her way and support from anybody who's interested, but this is her project."

Jabot's legal counsel is Edgar "Stumpy" Mouton, a respected attorney in legal and legislative circles around the state. He is considered the ultimate source of Jabot and the integrity of Doucet. "Everywhere she's gone, up to now, on my personal knowledge, is all legitimate," says Mouton.

WHAT BECOMES OBVIOUS VERY QUICKLY after meeting Doucet is that she is quick-witted and appears in possession of a good deal of money. The 28-year-old Washington, D.C., native was widowed at 15, and left with a six-month-old child.

She is vague about her professional background, saying only that she has no college degree and is self-taught in the business world. She did spend some time in Houston, where she had a janitorial service for restaurants.

Apparently, Doucet invested her money well. Colleagues and associates who prefer to remain anonymous say that she has been quiet.

"We have a lot of work before we can start," says Doucet. She anticipates that groundbreaking will be sometime in 1992. The project is divided into two phases, and it is still in the first portion of development.

Doucet is not remaining silent, though, and her and her staff are spreading rumors concerning the project.

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plans and completing all the preliminary work so that a project starts. The site is located north of Washington on Interstate 49 in the Westlake area, near Delcambre Lake.

Monteau was in Baton Rouge last week to speak personally to Corine Lewis, Gov. Buddy Roemer's advisor for economic development. Monteau is trying to pave the way for state assistance in areas such as right-of-way and access for transportation to the theme park.

In the meantime, the old Jabel office located on Interstate 49, just west of Opelousas, is being remodeled to house a main recording studio and the larger one is half a mile south of the theme park. The smaller version should be open in about 45 days, says Donsett. It will also accommodate the audio portion of the video studio. Eventually, the new studio will have all the facilities for complete production of videos.

Donsett declined to be specific about any bookings that have already been placed. "We'd rather not say at this time. They want to come out with it," she says.

For their reception, however, that the music will not be confined to any particular type or geographical area. She hopes that Louisiana's musicians will record with Jabel, but Donsett expects national names to be attracted as well. The proximity to the theme park is expected to be a big draw in getting groups to travel to Louisiana for recording purposes.

In fact, the whole premise for her plan. Initially, Donsett was only going to concentrate on a recording studio, because of her interest in and love of music. She realized that she would need another attraction to entice musicians to the state. "Nothing would have brought them in," she says. "That's when she realized that the idea of the theme park and the surrounding trappings.

Donsett doesn't plan to be too specific at either music or tourism, but she does hire those who are. She has employed sound technicians from New York and California for the most studios. She has also contracted with a consulting firm in Orlando that specializes in theme parks.

Tom Kranzak, vice president of the consulting firm Steve Baker & Associates, came away with high expectations after a pre-opening study, even though he was initially quite skeptical, says Donsett. "Basically, they were a little skeptical themselves during the swing area." Kranzak spent three months in the area analyzing the situation, and two studying Vermilionville's strengths and weaknesses. He divides the time in four

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