LIFE ON THE POINT

OVER THE YEARS, CYPREMORT POINT HAS DEVELOPED INTO THE PREMIER RECREATIONAL COMMUNITY IN ACADIANA.

BY RICHARD BAUDOUIN
PHOTOS BY JUDI LADOUESA

I t's noon on a hot July day, and the Cypremort Point Supply House is as busy as any shop on Johnston Street in Lafayette. In fact, you might think you are in Lafayette because of all of the local people in the all-purpose general store and café.

Restaurateurs Frank and Kathy Randol are eating shrimp burgers with their two boys in the dining area which overlooks the canal behind the store. Attorney Ken Dejean and wife Liz pull up in their boat to buy a few supplies for their camp. Homebuilder Patrick Colvin is checking the right bait for a fishing trip he's planning.

Presiding over the chaos is store owner Richard Legnon. He's been catering to the full- and part-time residents of Cypremort Point since 1973, when he moved here from New Iberia to open the store in an old camp just a few hundred yards off the main road to "The Point."

Legnon's store has made life a lot more convenient for the people who flock here every weekend. Before he opened, there was no place on this isolated outpost to buy groceries, ice, bait or the thousands of other items essential for life in a waterfront community. "When you came to The Point, you either brought it with you or you did without it," recalls Legnon, whose father built a camp here in the 1960s.

Equally important to life here is the community bonding which Legnon's store engenders. This is a spot where residents can meet, swap stories, shoot the breeze and—of utmost importance among fishermen—find out "who caught what where."

But Legnon's retail outlet is not his only contribution to the emergence of Cypremort Point as a first-class recreational community which is supporting major real estate development. Legnon and a handful of other people have brought major public improvements to this marshy peninsula in Vermilion Bay.

With the help of an experienced bonding attorney who donates his time, local residents have instituted fire protection, beefed up law enforcement, undertaken an effort to fight mosquitoes and laid the groundwork for a community-wide sewer system. As a result, Legnon and other key players, like contractor Gary Begnaud and seafood dealer Bob Auerbach, have launched major waterfront real-estate developments and marinas that look more like Florida than coastal Louisiana.

In the works is an even bigger public improvement project which could really spur interest in The Point. State and local officials announced last month that the federal government will fund construction of a high-rise bridge over the Intracoastal Canal about 10 miles...
Salt-water fishing is still the prime draw at The Point.
Auerbach has been a driving force in the effort to develop The Point's potential (he was referred to as "mayor of Cypremort Point" at the announcement of the new bridge), but he generally shuns publicity.

Auerbach is an enigmatic character. A native of New York City, he came to Cypremort Point some 20 years ago to set up a seafood-buying business, specializing in crabs. He established the Organization of Commercial Fishermen in the late 1970s and lobbied on behalf of the people who sold him seafood.

He has since leased out his business but decided to remain at The Point even though he doesn't fish or even own a boat. "Originally I was here to make a living," he says. "Now I like looking out in the bay and seeing the sailboats."

Auerbach has worked closely with Legnon (as well as other permanent residents of the area like Begnaud and shrimper "Junior" Schouest) in the effort to institute public improvements at Cypremort Point. Legnon says he and Auerbach work well together. The New Yorker conceives the theories, while the Cajun helps translate them into specifics which local people are willing to accept.

But without the assistance of Lonnie Bewley, Auerbach and Legnon's plans might never have gotten beyond conversations over the excellent hamburgers which top the menu at the Cypremort Point Supply House. Lonnie Bewley is a well-known bonding attorney with a New Orleans law firm, who virtually lives at his camp in Cypremort Point. "I use it as a second office," says Bewley. "You can get a lot more done down here."

Bewley advises numerous governmental bodies around the state on how to raise money to improve their communities. He has lent his expertise—at no charge—to the Cypremort Point community in an effort to upgrade the infrastructure here. "He had the knowledge and ability to come in here and really give us the ideas on where to go," says Legnon.

With Bewley's assistance, local leaders have some governmental structure to provide needed public services. They include:

- A law enforcement tax district, which generates funds so that the sheriff of St. Mary Parish (where Cypremort Point is located) can beef up police patrols at night and on the weekend;
- A fire protection district, which will soon purchase a sophisticated truck capable of fighting blazes in the multi-story dwellings which have sprung up here;
- A mosquito abatement program;
- The basic structure for a public sewer system. Money derived from the sewer district tax is currently being used to

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of the facility and possible improvements.

The limiting factor, though, is money. With the state always on the verge of having to shut down state parks because of budget problems, it’s unlikely that any bold new ventures will be undertaken—no matter how worthy.

Native Cypremort Point resident Leo Olander, a semi-retired shrimper, says that with a little attention—and some dredging of sand—the park would really grow in popularity. “It would be the shining star of South Louisiana,” he says.

Olander has lived on Cypremort Point for all of his 66 years, with the exception of a short period when he moved inland. He endorses the growth which has taken place in his native region, as well as the public improvements.

“It’s for the betterment,” says Olander. Some commercial fishing interests fear that sportmen are trying to prevent them from making a living, says Olander, but their concern is not widespread. “I don’t think they feel threatened by it.”

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adjacent to his store. He’s calling the houses “dockominiums” because they will have complete berthing facilities for boats.

The Point’s capacity for growth is ultimately limited by the small amount of land suitable for development. Much of the property in the area is classified as wetlands and securing permits for construction in such protected areas is very difficult. Some wetlands areas which have already been impacted by encroaching civilization might be eligible for development, but most will probably be off-limits.

Quintana Marine Subdivision, one of the new developments on The Point.

 Virtually all of the high land here is already occupied by housing of one sort or another. However, many of the less-expensive camps occupy rented land. If property owners sense a market for more upscale development, they could boot the tenants. Still, the really desirable pieces, i.e., near the waterfront, are owner-occupied, and the owners are not likely to move.

“Any development is going to be very slow, very controlled and very studied,” says Auerbach.

Another limiting factor is the fear of killer hurricanes, always a concern to current or potential property owners. Cypremort Point is exposed to open waters and, as such, is extremely vulnerable to storms. “I sit out on my wharf and look in and say ‘That’s a hurricane’s dream,’” jokes one camp owner.

credits the decreased destruction to more stringent building standards which are now in place at The Point.

St. Mary Parish building codes require that all new dwellings at Cypremort Point be constructed at least 15 feet off the ground. Any structure built below that level must be of breakaway construction. St. Mary Parish inspectors enforce the regulation. Failure to conform could render the entire parish ineligible for flood insurance.

Most of the camps that you see that have been built over the last 6-8 years did not have major damages, with a few exceptions,” says Delcambre.

But the impact of Andrew on The Point could have been much worse. The eye of the hurricane made landfall to the east of Cypremort, which meant that the area was spared a tidal surge. It was essentially a “dry” hurricane. Had the hurricane made landfall to the west of The Point, homes would have suffered water damage as well. “Had it gone 20 miles to the west of Cypremort Point, there would have been a lot more damage,” says Delcambre.

If the hurricane hit The Point head-on, says Legnon, “then we’d be like St. Mary Parish inspectors enforce the regulation. Failure to conform could render the entire parish ineligible for flood insurance.

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