Filling time
Man revamps 1930s service station

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CARENCRO — The orange, blue and white Gulf Oil Co. colors have painted lasting impressions for Kermit Doucet.

Doucet once labored in and loved the Gulf service station his father owned more than 50 years ago in Washington, La. Although Gulf no longer sells petroleum products, the small town station where Doucet once worked is an image he immaculately preserved.

A replicated 1930s-era rural service station and Gulf Oil museum, now under construction, creates a poignant peek at the oil company's 83-year history. The museum will be located adjacent to Doucet's rural home in Carencro. Doucet's museum depicts a personal car service era that once made sure the customer always returned.

A Lafayette lawyer, Doucet began his quest for Gulf Oil artifacts several years ago. His personal collection of Gulf gasoline pumps, signs and retail items issued by the company for nearly 83 years is only part of the museum's expanding inventory.

Former Gulf employees also kept a lot of items that were initially going to be destroyed by Chevron, said Doucet.

Trades and purchases with other collectors are made by researching price guides similar to ones produced for coin and sports card collectors, Doucet said.

He said he has discovered few items in antique shops, flea markets and traveling the backroads, searching for old stations. "When Chevron bought Gulf, they tried to wipe (Gulf) out of existence. But some of the people who worked for Gulf kept what they had," said Doucet.

Lafayette Parish building codes require costly building modifications which currently prohibit Doucet from opening his museum to the public, he said.

His plans are to preserve the contents and use the structure as a private museum. His station-recreation efforts are aimed at the 1930s, mainly because he prefers the art-deco architecture of that time period.

"I've always liked museums, but I've never seen one of a service station that tried to portray one era, one company or one design. "I got rid of everything and stuck with old Gulf. After all," he said. "That's what I started with."