Central

Passing a good-neighbor attitude from one generation to the next

Stories by SAPAH SUE GOLDSMITH/Associate editor
Photos by JOHN BOES/Adapter staff

comfortable-looking homes nestled on sprawling lawns. Many have fences. Some have barns. A few have cattle or horses may graze nearby. The residents have lived there for as many as 20 generations. "This is God's country," is the universal reason so many families have remained in Central. Central is a separate town. It is in East Baton Rouge Parish but is not part of Baton Rouge. Baton Rougeans tend to regard Central as some remote farming community on the outskirts of town. Yet Central is rich in the history of the parish. Residents do not consider themselves rural.

What characterizes the community? Who lives in it, and how do they feel about where they live? How does Central differ from Baton Rouge as a place to live? Magazine interviewed several lifelong and long-time residents and asked them questions. State Rep. Donald E. Keyroud, Central's mayor, said it's a good place to live. "When I was growing up in Central, Central was a very rural community," said Keyroud. "I'm no longer in the LSU Athletic Department. "Mostly farmed or raised dairy cattle, or worked at Exxon or Ethyl."

Women drove school buses. "As did his mother.

Families were large, he recalled. "It was a loving and caring community of big families. - Carpenters, Builders, Brownings, Montgomerys. - There were always eight or nine brothers and sisters in a family. Everybody knew each other and we looked out for each other. If you needed to build a barn, all his neighbors would get together for three or four days and build a barn. Then he would reciprocate when his neighbors needed something."

Sibyl Robinson told of an elderly couple in recent years who had a huge town hall at the pharmacy. "The whole neighborhood had a garage sale you wouldn't believe. One of the businesses opened a vacant building to have the garage sale. Everybody helped. Gorgeous clothing and toys were donated to the garage sale. The income from sale of their barn, and the roof over was used to help with other people's medical bills."

Keyroud, who counted barn sales seven generations of Central residents in his own family, said 300 kinds turned out for a family reunion several years ago.

Families are not as large now as they used to be. The farm, once several hundred acres, have dwindled to small estates. Each generation, parents divided the land among their children. Parcels became smaller and smaller.

But the feeling of eating remains. "Everybody has a big family, everyone helps each other. We're all part of the community."

Her kitchen draws visitors who pour themselves coffee and sit down to view. "The community got divided when Sugar was governor," he said. "But that was just politics, and they got over it. It's one big family, neighbors and all."

Churches and centers of social activities in Central, everyone interviewed said. Most problems in the community are attended by attending either Blackstone Methodist, Zora Baptist or St. Alphonse Catholic Church. Youth groups covered the church and community outreach involve nearly everyone. Residents have lunch at their churches. Some of

NEIGHBORHOODS

This week, Magazine begins a weekly series on Baton Rouge neighborhoods. We start with a profile of Central, which, of course, is not part of the city of Baton Rouge at all, but is the geographical center of East Baton Rouge Parish.

Future installments will be confined to a single page with short features, pictures, and a column of brief news items from the neighborhoods.

As the permanent series makes its way through Baton Rouge, we encourage readers to help us by submitting neighborhood items as well as ideas for feature stories and pictures.

Please address news items or comments to Magazine, P.O. Box 555, Baton Rouge, La. 70821, or call 383-1111, ext. 318.