Step onto Avery Island

AVERY ISLAND — We all dream of a place of simple beauty, safety, community and prosperity to call home. For the 213 or so residents of Avery Island, that dream comes true every morning when they awake.

The island, actually a salt dome that juts high above the surrounding marsh and Cajun prairie land, is a 5,000-acre circular knob of joy soaring serenely through life.

Home to Jungle Gardens, the Cargill Salt mine, oil wells, thousands of birds and other wildlife, and a little hot sauce company named McIlhenny that produces something called Tabasco, Avery Island is a beacon of stability in the hurly-burly of modern life. Just ask Alura Benoit, island resident and Jungle Gardens employee for 18 years.

"This is a beautiful place to live and raise a family," said Benoit, who sent five children to Avery Island Elementary School (all of whom now work on the island) and whose husband, William, just retired from the salt mine. "All you hear in the morning are the birds."

The Benoit family lives in a McIlhenny-owned home on the island. All island residents must work on the island or be retired from McIlhenny to be able to rent one of the tidy tin-roofed homes.

The island, actually owned by Avery Island Inc. (a land management concern closely tied to the McIlhenny family) has its own store, post office, private road system, security patrol and 50-cent toll gate.

At one time, said Postmistress Beverly Trahan, the salt mine provided housing as well, and almost everyone who worked churned out Tabasco sauce since 1868 lived on the island. very tightly, still maintain cottages around the island.

Trahan credits the company and its helpfully paternalistic attitude towards its employees, with allowing her to raise a family in comfort and peace on the island. After she and her husband started their family, Trahan was able to stay on the island in an almost rent-free company home and work part-time at the post office and raise her family.

"I just hope I never have to move off." Trahan said. "This is a beautiful place to live and raise a family," said Benoit, who sent five children to Avery Island Elementary School (all of whom now work on the island) and whose husband, William, just retired from the salt mine. "All you hear in the morning are the birds."

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