‘Tiger Town’ home to an eclectic mix

BY ED CULLEN
Advocate staff writer

Antonio Losavio didn’t know he’d created a lifestyle in 1917 when he bought land bordering the northern edge of the future campus of LSU.

Losavio called what became a neighborhood of residences and businesses “Tiger Town.” Most of the businesses were on State and Chimes streets, on the west side of Highland Road at the north gate of LSU.

Professors and their families, townspeople and students lived in the houses on the east side of Highland Road between Highland and Dalrymple Drive.

In 1917, the Hart family’s Magnolia Mound

See ‘TIGER TOWN’, page 9A
planted ran to the edge of another plantation that became LSU in 1918 when the land for the university was purchased. LSU's move from downtown started in 1925 and was completed in 1931.

Loisavos's grandson, Pete, remembers sitting in Tiger Stadium with his dad, Peter Sr., one fall night.

"I remember walking full moon, Dad said, 'I hate full moons. When we farmed this land, we worked it at night and day.'" Antonio Losavos bought the land in the 1950s. When he moved to Tiger Town, his farm was expropriated to make way for Luther. The football stadium occupies part of the old farm, Losavos named his new venture Campeche View.

Present day Chimes Street represents Losavos's Campeche View from the LSU campus. The construction of Smith Hall, today called Pleasant Hall, blocked the street's view of the Campeche. Antonio Losavos and his family, using shovels and wheelbarrows, filled part of the low land that became University Shopping Center, Pete Losavos said.

"You know how West State and West Chimes come together?" Losavos said.

Until that part of Tiger Town got drainage, the street was aptly named, he said.

As Tiger Town developed as a business district, the neighborhood on the other side of Highland Road became the home of University professors and townpeople before students made it a little bayou Bohemia.

From the 1960s to 2000, students delighted in saying they were headed for "the library," a popular bar and restaurant that burned in 1973, and the reopened a few doors down Chimes Street for almost another 20 years.

Over the years, students knew the Dutchmill, a tiny restaurant, and then Louise's Dutchmill, and finally Louise's in different locations.

Businesses — restaurants, bars, pool halls, bookstores, ice cream parlors, jewelry stores, groceries, movie houses, laundries, shoe repair shops, drugstores — came and went. One generation of LSU students hung out at Edwards Orange Bowl, which burned in 1963. Tiger Town's become Round the Corner restaurant and is today Serra Deli.

Dale Mathews was owner and sole employee of The Backpacker in 1974.

"I pick up kids from school, and from Corunica to next door," he said.

"After school I do the same thing that other guys do. I never met her next door neighbor," he said.

"They're not called the "Kaan's Apartments anymore," Pentecost said. "They're not called anything. Home, inn, guest."

Tiger Town retains its Canopy Row atmosphere with "The Field" on Ivanhoe Street, home of impromptu cookouts, overnight campers passing through town, a music festival, and dog parties.

Hannah Murray, 22, lived on Ivanhoe Street three years. Interviewed May, just before she graduated, the New Orleans art history student was already nostalgic for the neighborhood she would be leaving soon.

"Living on campus is expensive. Live on Ivanhoe and eat a lot of pasta," Murray said.

Murray and other employees of Highland Coffee supplement their diet of pasta with bagels from the shop.

"I've spent much less money there," she said.

"My grandmother came in and said, 'I'm glad you're graduating.'"

Though some Ivanhoe Street landlords don't keep up their buildings — "it would be nice to not have oiling tiles fall on you while you're sleeping" — Murray would hate it if Ivanhoe went condo, as have other parts of Tiger Town.

"They're erasing the past," she said.

"If new buildings are built, the rents will be higher than students can afford," said longtime landlord Cynthia Morris. Cynthia and her husband, Richard, who was on East State Street, passed management of their rental properties to their son. The Morrises don't see condos as much of a threat to the neighborhood.

"I don't think Tiger Town will change that much," said Richard Morris. "There are too many individual owners." For years, Cynthia Morris collected rent and dealt with student tenants. Most of her tenants were responsible people, she said, though there were ones who wanted to move from one apartment to another rather than clean the one they were in. Miranda Maxwell Juran, co-owner of Juran's restaurant on Perkins Road, said, "They're not very clean." When the movie let out at the Vertus next door, children went to Maxwell's to read comic books until their parents arrived to drive them home.

At Campus Clothes, a door north of the Vertus Theatre, Elton Martinez said he would never sell a button on for you. "I don't sell you a place where you could run around," said Billy Prescott, whose parents owned Co-op Bookstore.

During World War II, "the warehouses were full of children," Prescott said. "I came every day to the bookstore with my dad in the summertime. He could always find something for me to do." "My family lived with my grandmother at the corner of State and Dalrymple," said Wayne Amos, 72. "When I wasn't living there, I visited often. It was my neighborhood." Until LSU discovered Amos and his buddies in the steam tunnels beneath the campus, the explorers rounded the university above and below ground. Dungeons and Drakes on Ivanhoe Street is the most famous tunnel in the 1970s. Amos remembers the man who dug a lake behind his grandmother's house at State and Dalrymple.

The man used the dirt to fill swampland for a fine house and a workout track for her son.

"We roamed the campus," Amos said. "Our playground was City Park and University Lake, where we'd swim the beaches."

Many families moved away from Tiger Town after the war and were replaced by students. Some absentee or inattentive landlords allowed students to remodel at will.

Ruth Lane, 87, lived in The Ginger, a two-story barracks on Chimes, in the 1970s, renting out rooms to tenants who opened the roof of his apartment to add a left and another tenant to make his entire apartment into a dark room.

"I had to move because of someone monitoring your coming and going," Murray said. "Living on Ivanhoe Street is the most growing I've done as a woman. It's given me the room to grow. I don't want to lose this kind of neighborhood. I find you."

When the movie let out at the Vertus next door, children went to Maxwell's to read comic books until their parents arrived to drive them home. At Campus Clothes, a door north of the Vertus Theatre, Elton Martinez said he would never sell a button on for you. "I don't sell you a place where you could run around," said Billy Prescott, whose parents owned Co-op Bookstore.

During World War II, "the warehouses were full of children," Prescott said. "I came every day to the bookstore with my dad in the summertime. He could always find something for me to do." "My family lived with my grandmother at the corner of State and Dalrymple," said Wayne Amos, 72. "When I wasn't living there, I visited often. It was my neighborhood." Until LSU discovered Amos and his buddies in the steam tunnels beneath the campus, the explorers rounded the university above and below ground. Dungeons and Drakes on Ivanhoe Street is the most famous tunnel in the 1970s. Amos remembers the man who dug a lake behind his grandmother's house at State and Dalrymple.

The man used the dirt to fill swampland for a fine house and a workout track for her son.

"We roamed the campus," Amos said. "Our playground was City Park and University Lake, where we'd swim the beaches."

Many families moved away from Tiger Town after the war and were replaced by students. Some absentee or inattentive landlords allowed students to remodel at will.