WHAT CAN YOU BUY WITH $10 MILLION?

University of Louisiana at Lafayette baseball coach Tony Robichaux has a wish list for major renovations at M.L. “Tigue” Moore Field. Ragin’ Cajuns athletic director Scott Farmer has a $10 million budget for the project.

Plans are in place for some degree of work at the 37-year-old stadium to begin this year, and to continue in earnest after the 2016 season, but it remains to be seen what is feasible and what’s not.

Farmer said recently that a general contractor has been selected — The Lemoine Company, which is Louisiana-based — and after a five-hour meeting last week it is now evaluating what has already been proposed by the school and architects.

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WHAT’S A BALLGAME WITHOUT FRESH ROASTED PEANUTS?

As 93-year-old World War II and Korean War veteran Vic Kilchrist recalls things today, he bought his first peanut roaster sometime in the early 1990s — for $66 at a junkyard.

It took him two years to get it working right.

Now, for the past two-plus decades, Vic The Peanut Man has been a staple at The Tigue, hawking his salted snacks from a stand in front of his green Tuff Shed at the home of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette baseball team.

Ragin’ Cajuns coach Tony Robichaux has fought to keep him there, too.

“Vic’s been with me for a long time,” said Robichaux, who has had Kilchrist and his peanuts at his team’s home stadium since becoming UL’s head coach in 1995 — and before that at McNeese State.

“One time, the old caterer wanted him out, and they were going to buy their own roasters and roast peanuts. We had to kind of sit with the old caterer and work things out, to where they understood it wasn’t the
"We're gonna tweak the drawings a little bit," Farmer said, "and then Lemoine's going to do a rough-cost estimate to make sure we're on the ball stadium." "I don't think the drawings are fine," he said. "We've captured here. We've captured everything, but I've actually followed it. We've captured the outfield to 50-50 ticket sales and kids joining the team. We've captured the heritage, and that's really important to me, because it's one of our things right now. We can get nachos and popcorn anywhere, but we have nowhere to display it." "I think ($10 million) is a little bit scary," Robichaux knows what he wants, though, "and I don't think the firm picked for the project was the right one." "Perhaps the next time we meet we might have a little bit more of an idea if we're falling within the realm of the budget (and) what we can do this summer or next summer," Farmer said. "For now, only lighting-related work is planned for prior to 2016. UL's masterplan calls for the core of the existing structure to be replaced with a new "state of the art of facility," with current baseline benchmarks bridged by "infilling a new three story building that will house adequately equipped spectator accommodations, additional club seating... press facilities and box suites." "The vision is to give a university and a baseball coach that they deserve to have," said architect Eric Crozier, a UL grad. "We learned quickly after taking on the project that what happens at the Tigue means much to many programs -- and Robichaux -- supporters." "Lajayne" and "Kajun Joe" Robichaux "had a very strong and loyal fan base," he said, "but we've been very pleasantly surprised, and it's exceeded all of my expectations, (by) how much feedback I'm getting from people who are loyal to him. It's actually a beautiful thing to see." "Robichaux wants the renovated stadium to both retain its charm and respect the program's history." From pine trees behind the outfield to 50-50 ticket sales and kids joining the players on the field on Sundays for the National Anthem, "The Tigue oozes charm." Robichaux was reminded of that when upper-tier renters were working on the first Tigue series talked to him recently. "Every one of them told me... the best atmosphere... the best atmosphere to play in," he said. "I think ($10 million) is a little bit scary," Robichaux knows what he wants, though, "and I don't think the firm picked for the project was the right one." "Perhaps the next time we meet we might have a little bit more of an idea if we're falling within the realm of the budget (and) what we can do this summer or next summer," Farmer said. "For now, only lighting-related work is planned for prior to 2016. UL's masterplan calls for the core of the existing structure to be replaced with a new "state of the art of facility," with current baseline benchmarks bridged by "infilling a new three story building that will house adequately equipped spectator accommodations, additional club seating... press facilities and box suites." "The vision is to give a university and a baseball coach that they deserve to have," said architect Eric Crozier, a UL grad. "We learned quickly after taking on the project that what happens at the Tigue means much to many programs -- and Robichaux -- supporters." "Lajayne" and "Kajun Joe" Robichaux "had a very strong and loyal fan base," he said, "but we've been very pleasantly sur-
have nowhere to display it.

“We've got a guy (Guedry) who is in Monument Park at Yankee Stadium, on the side of Ruth and Mantle, and you walk in our stadium, and you wouldn't know it. We have to display that. Mr. Moore (M.L. "Tigue") needs to be displayed out front.

“So,” he added, “those are the things that are real important to me — to reward all the past players that grinded us out through the tough times, when we didn't have a lot of budget and they were still winning.”

Robichaux also wants to be sure there are, as planned, private suites — both indoor and perhaps outdoor.

He deems that especially important in light of a recent downturn in the oil industry, several of whose local movers and shakers are big program financial backers, and higher-education budgetary cuts.

“You not only have to build something that's good, but that's a revenue generator,” Robichaux said.

It remains to be seen how much capacity will increase at The Tigue, which currently seats 3,755.

But Farmer does expect some expansion.

“Tony and I are on the same page that we need some more seats, but not an astronomical number of them,” Farmer said.

Even after last week's lengthy meeting, there are numerous other unknowns. All Robichaux knows for sure: He wants to add as much as realistically possibly.

Having DLR help sort through it all should help.

“They've done a lot of these,” Crozier said of a firm that's worked on baseball construction/renovation projects at schools including LSU, Texas, Nebraska and Oregon. "They understand that there are politics and money — what can we do, how many people can we satisfy all at once?"

Robichaux would love to have the budget expanded if increased donations allow, but also accepts that there will be limits.

"I understand we can't put $26 million on baseball," he said.

Even with that in mind, though, the Cajun coach wants to be sure what's done in the next couple years addresses what's needed not only now also later.

“This will be a one-time thing for a long time, probably,” Robichaux said.

“Along the way,” he added, “we'll have what's called a gut check. We'll have to see what can we do for what we have.”

Deep down, though, Robichaux is firm about what must be done.

“We've got the keep the character in the ballpark,” he said. “That's my No. 1 priority. Keep the Ragin' Cajun in the ballpark.”