



THE REAL NEWS

Louisiana

"A Community With a Voice Shall Be Heard" ®

Publisher: Latorria Freeman



City of Natchitoches Summer Youth Program Concludes Successful Nine- Week Session

Natchitoches, LA – August 1, 2026 – Today marks the final day of the City of Natchitoches Summer Youth Program, celebrating the achievements of local teens who dedicated their summer to serving the community. Over the past nine weeks, participants worked side-by-side with city employees across multiple departments, gaining hands-on experience in local government operations while contributing meaningfully to ongoing projects and initiatives.

Their hard work, dedication, and eagerness to learn left a lasting positive impact on the city." On behalf of Mayor Ronnie Williams Jr. and the entire City of Natchitoches family, we extend our heartfelt thanks to every participant for spending your summer serving our community," city officials stated. "We are incredibly proud of each and every one of you. As you head back to school, carry forward the lessons, friendships, and experiences you gained this summer. We wish you a safe, successful, and amazing school year ahead." The City of Natchitoches Summer Youth Program continues to play a vital role in developing future leaders by providing real-world exposure to public service and municipal operations.

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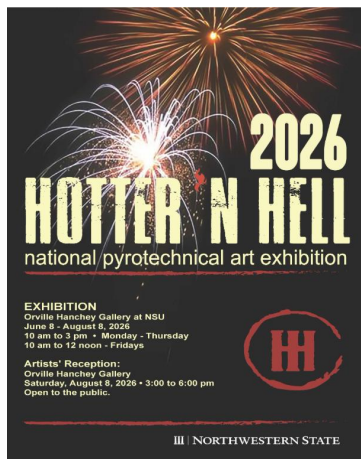


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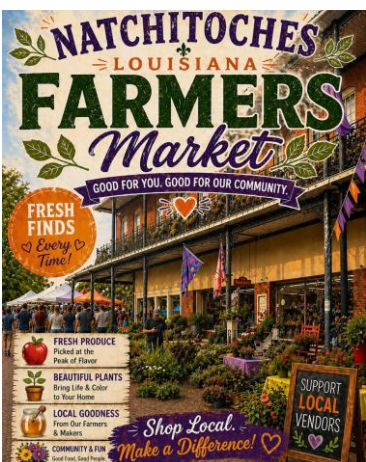
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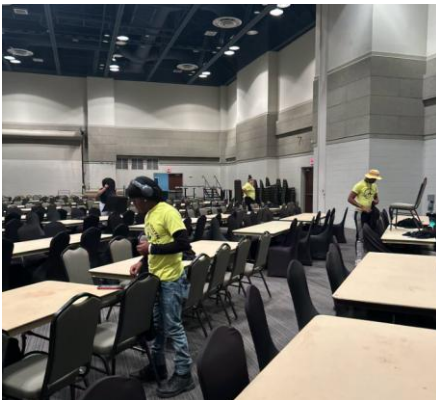


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City of Natchitoches Summer Youth Program Concludes Successful Nine-Week Session



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**NATCHITOCHES:****Congratulations**

to our BOM Bank graduates! Please join us in congratulating Logan Lambert, Jared McGlocklin, Brooke Latham, and Gabe Neal on successfully completing the Commercial Lending Development Program (CLDP)!

Formerly known as the Credit Analyst Education Program, the CLDP is a collaborative initiative between the LSU Department of Finance, LSU E. J. Ourso College of Business, and the Louisiana Bankers Association. The program equips banking professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in commercial lending through in-depth training in credit analysis, loan structuring, portfolio management, market research, and industry evaluation.

We are proud of Logan, Jared, Brooke, and Gabe for their commitment to professional growth and their dedication to serving our customers and communities. Your hard work and achievement reflect the excellence we strive for every day at BOM Bank. [Congratulations](#) on this outstanding accomplishment!

RAPIDES:

BOM Bank made a donation to the Pineville High School Cheer Team to support its athletes as they build teamwork, leadership, school spirit, and a tradition of excellence both on and off the sidelines. We are proud to invest in local students and programs that help young people develop confidence, discipline, and lifelong skills through extracurricular activities. Pictured left to right: Aubryi Adcock and BOM's Jessica Brunson. At BOM Bank, we're always cheering on the next generation of leaders!

**CADDO/BOSSIER:**

BOM Bank is proud to support organizations that make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. As part of our second-quarter volunteer efforts, our North Louisiana market donated much-needed supplies to Arvad Ministries House of Grace NWLA, a Christ-centered home for young women ages 18–24. House of Grace provides a safe, supportive environment where each resident can focus on achieving important life goals—whether that's earning a high school diploma, getting a first job, or learning to drive—without the burden of worrying about where their next meal will come from or where they'll sleep. Pictured with the donated supplies is BOM's Melinda Williams. We are honored to partner with organizations that bring hope, encouragement, and opportunity to the communities we serve.

**SABINE:**

BOM Bank was proud to support the community and the ministries making a difference in the lives of children. We were honored to donate five bicycles to Macedonia Baptist Church in Zwolle for their Vacation Bible School, that took place June 16-18. The VBS program was open to all ages and featured fun and games, arts and crafts, music, Bible stories, and opportunities to make new friends. Pictured left to right are BOM Bank's Jett Bullock, Bridget Hicks, Shon Payton, Jermaine Thomas, and BOM Bank's Kristi Lee. Thank you to Macedonia Baptist Church for investing in our youth and creating a place where faith and fellowship come together. We are grateful to partner with organizations that strengthen our communities and share God's love.



MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESSNESS PROGRAM



ENSURING EDUCATIONAL STABILITY FOR
STUDENTS NAVIGATING HOUSING TRANSITIONS

Stay In School

- ✓ Immediate enrollment with or without paperwork

Student Support

- ✓ Academic services and after-school programs
- ✓ School uniforms for qualifying applicants

Transportation

- ✓ Transportation provided to the student's school of origin

Family Support

- ✓ Referrals to local community services

To complete the Louisiana Student Residency Questionnaire Form, scan the QR code OR contact
Alexa Bernard-Conday, Ed.S.
 Coordinator of Homeless Services and Federal Programs at
Alexa.Bernard@nspb.la or (318) 238-0702



The Natchitoches Parish School Board (NPSB) offers support through the McKinney-Vento Program to ensure educational stability for students experiencing housing transitions.

Key services include:

- Immediate school enrollment with or without paperwork
- Academic support and after-school programs
- School uniforms for qualifying students
- Transportation to the student's original school
- Referrals to local community resources

Families can access help by scanning the QR code to complete the Louisiana Student Residency Questionnaire or by contacting:
Alexa Bernard- Conday, Ed.S.
 Coordinator of Homeless Services
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This program helps remove barriers so students can stay in school despite housing challenges.

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No More Pennies: U.S. Ends Production After 232 Years

The United States Mint struck its final circulating penny on November 12, 2025, at the Philadelphia facility, closing a chapter that began in 1793. After more than two centuries, the one-cent coin is no longer being produced for everyday use.

END OF AN ERA

U.S. TO END PRODUCTION OF

PENNIES

After more than 230 years, the U.S. is saying goodbye to the one-cent coin.

PENNY PRODUCTION DISCONTINUED

\$

Cost to produce a penny is more than one cent

Move expected to save millions of taxpayer dollars

Pennies remain legal tender and can still be used

The decision stemmed from simple economics. Producing each penny had climbed to roughly 3.69 cents—more than three times its face value—due to rising material, facility, and overhead costs. Officials project annual savings of about \$56 million by stopping production. With cash transactions declining and the penny’s purchasing power near zero, the Treasury Department determined continued minting was neither fiscally responsible nor necessary.

Existing pennies remain legal tender. Estimates of those still in circulation range from roughly 114 billion to 300 billion—far more than commerce requires. The Federal Reserve will recirculate them for as long as possible. Businesses may continue pricing in one-cent increments, though some are already rounding cash transactions to the nearest nickel as supplies tighten in certain areas. Limited numismatic versions will still be produced for collectors. For most Americans, the change will feel gradual: the familiar Lincoln cent simply won’t be replenished. The move mirrors earlier retirements of low-value coins in other countries and marks the first U.S. circulating coin discontinued for low value since the half-cent in 1857.

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Reception to mark closing of Hotter 'N Hell National Art Exhibition

NATCHITOCHES - The closing reception for Hotter 'N Hell National Art Exhibition 2026 will be held at Northwestern State University's Orville Hanchey Gallery on Saturday, Aug. 8 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. This year's exhibition features artists from 17 states.

The Hotter 'N Hell Exhibition is a juried show featuring all art forms that use fire and heat as part of the creative process. That could include ceramics, glassblowing, welded sculpture, poured metals, wood-burning, metalsmithing, burned textiles and more.

This year's juror is Michael Williams, MFA. Raised in Pineville, Williams is an artist whose work is grounded in a deep engagement with three-dimensional form and visual storytelling. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art with a Concentration in Ceramics from Louisiana College (now Louisiana Christian University) before continuing his studies at Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi, where he received a Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts with a Three-Dimensional Studio Concentration.

Williams's artwork has been featured in more than twenty solo and group exhibitions, reflecting his ongoing commitment to material exploration and contemporary craft. In addition to his studio practice, he is a published illustrator whose work spans multiple media.

He currently serves as the gallery director at Louisiana Christian University and is a professor in the School of Media, Communication, and the Fine Arts, where he holds the Eugenia Colvin Dawson Professorship in Art. Through both his professional roles and his artistic practice, Williams continues to foster creative growth in his community while contributing to the broader visual arts field.



**2026
HOTTER 'N HELL**
national pyrotechnical art exhibition

EXHIBITION
Orville Hanchey Gallery at NSU
June 8 - August 8, 2026
10 am to 3 pm • Monday - Thursday
10 am to 12 noon - Fridays

Artists' Reception:
Orville Hanchey Gallery
Saturday, August 8, 2026 • 3:00 to 6:00 pm
Open to the public.

III | NORTHWESTERN STATE

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For Investigations, dial 357-7830

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Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce Congratulates July Ambassador of the Month JoJo Dodd with BOM Bank



The Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce is proud to name JoJo Dodd of BOM Bank as the July Ambassador of the Month. JoJo has demonstrated outstanding dedication to the Natchitoches community through consistent involvement, enthusiastic support of local initiatives, and a genuine commitment to helping the area grow and prosper.



As a valued ambassador, JoJo has played a key role in strengthening community partnerships and advancing the mission of the Chamber. JoJo's hard work and positive presence make a meaningful difference in Natchitoches," said the Chamber. "We are grateful for everything they do to help our community thrive." The Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce extends its sincere congratulations to JoJo Dodd on this well-deserved recognition. Thank you for your continued service and commitment to making Natchitoches a better place for everyone. Join us in celebrating JoJo's accomplishments!

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Covington facilitates N.C. summer math camp for K-12 teachers

NATCHITOCHES – Judith Covington, professor of mathematics at Northwestern State University, served as a facilitator for the North Carolina Network of Math Teachers' Circles (NCNMTC) Summer Math Camp for K-12 teachers at Western Carolina University in the mountains of Western Carolina. The camp took place July 20-22.

Participants were housed at the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT <https://www.nccat.org/>). Due to the renovations at NCCAT, the sessions were held on the campus of Western Carolina University.

"While at the camp I facilitated three sessions. The first was FLIP 7 where participants learned about the FLIP 7 game and discussed the mathematics involved in the game and what a good strategy would be for playing the game," she explained.

"The second session was about Parking Functions where drivers had preferred parking spots and guidelines about how to park. Participants analyzed whether or not all cars would be able to park. In the final session, titled Math or Magic, participants watched a video of a card trick and determined the mathematics that made the trick work.

This is the 12th year that NCNMTC has held a summer camp and the eighth year that Covington was invited to facilitate sessions. She said the best part of attending Math Camp is working with the teachers involved.

"These teachers are always so eager to jump in and participate and they enjoy the challenges presented to them. Being in the mountains in July is not bad either," she said.

Covington leads a local Math Teachers' Circle called Math 4 Fun that meets bimonthly on the NSU campus. For more information, she can be reached at covingtonj@nsula.edu. All teachers are invited to attend.



Judith Covington:

Dr. Judith Covington, bottom left corner, was a facilitator for the North Carolina Network of Math Teachers' Circles Summer Math Camp for K-12 teachers.



Caddo DA's Office Welcomes Natchitoches Native Shayla Johnson as New Assistant District Attorney

Shreveport, LA — The Caddo Parish District Attorney's Office is proud to announce the addition of Natchitoches native Shayla Johnson as a new Assistant District Attorney. Johnson joins the office with deep local roots and significant experience in the Louisiana justice system. She is no stranger to the Caddo Parish Courthouse, having previously served as a law clerk for Judges Brady O'Callaghan and Don Hathaway, Jr., a dedicated public servant, Johnson began her career in the criminal justice field as a probation officer with the State of Louisiana.



She brings valuable courtroom experience and a practical understanding of both the prosecution and supervision sides of the justice system. Johnson is a proud graduate of Natchitoches Central High School. She went on to earn her undergraduate degree from Northwestern State University and her Juris Doctor from Southern University Law Center. "Shayla's familiarity with our courts, combined with her commitment to public service and strong North Louisiana roots, makes her an excellent addition to our team," said the Caddo DA's Office. "We are thrilled to welcome her back to the region in her new role. "The office invites the community to join in welcoming Natchitoches native Shayla Johnson to her new position as Assistant District Attorney.

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NSU-Shreveport Registration Rally brings enrollment support to north Louisiana students

One-stop event connected students with university offices and resources ahead of the fall semester.

NATCHITOCHEs – Northwestern State University students from across north Louisiana preparing for the fall semester completed enrollment, met with university staff and connected with campus resources during Registration Rally at the NSU Shreveport campus July 27.

The event, held from 9 a.m. to noon, brought together representatives from Financial Aid, the Registrar's Office, Student Accounting and Cashiering, Admissions, academic colleges and other university departments to answer questions and guide students through the enrollment process. By hosting Registration Rally in Shreveport, NSU gave students across north Louisiana the opportunity to complete enrollment closer to home before classes begin.

Payton Romero, assistant director of recruiting for transfer and graduate students at NSU, said students could complete several enrollment steps during one visit.

"Today on the Shreveport campus, we have representatives from admissions, Financial Aid and their academic advisors here as well," Romero said. "They are checking in with us. We are making sure they are good on the admissions side, making sure they do not have any registration holds and that we have all of their documents. Then they can meet with Financial Aid. They can also get their student ID today, and then we will send them to meet with their advisor and get registered for fall classes. It's a one-stop shop for everything today."

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NSU-Shreveport Registration Rally brings enrollment support to north Louisiana students

Maggie Schoenborn of Bossier City attended Registration Rally to prepare for her first semester at NSU.

"It was really easy. Everyone was really nice and helped me get ready, figure out all of my classes and told me what to expect and how to get it all set up," Schoenborn said.

Schoenborn said attending Registration Rally gave her the opportunity to register for classes and prepare for the fall semester in one visit.

Chandler Gardner of Shreveport attended Registration Rally to prepare for the fall semester.

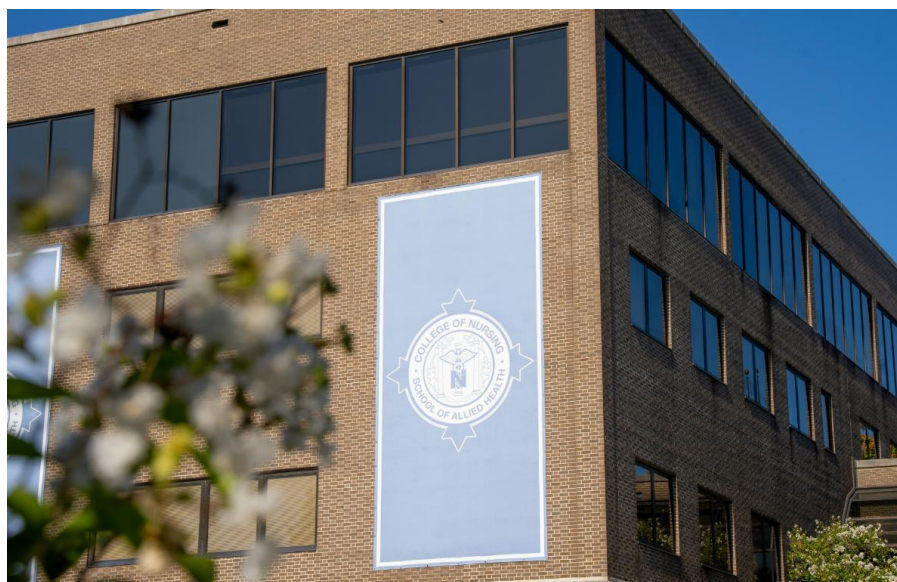
"I just got all my classes scheduled, talked to the financial people about my tuition, got my ID. Now I'm ready to go," Gardner said.

Gardner said Registration Rally allowed her to complete several enrollment steps in one visit before the start of the fall semester.

Registration Rally is open to new and returning students and provides an opportunity to complete multiple enrollment steps during one visit before the semester begins.

Registration for the fall semester will continue through Aug. 16. Late registration, during which additional fees apply, will continue through Aug. 25. Information about registration is available at vic.nsula.edu.

Shreveport Registration Rally



Northwestern State University's College of Nursing and School of Allied Health building on the NSU Shreveport campus hosted Registration Rally July 27.



Chandler Gardner meets with a Northwestern State representative during Registration Rally at the NSU Shreveport campus July 27.

More Unanswered Questions Fuel Doubts In Nolan Wells' Death

Ocean Springs, Mississippi — Weeks after the tragic death of 18-year-old Nolan Xavier Wells on Horn Island, new details from an independent autopsy have only deepened the mystery surrounding his final hours, leaving his family, the community, and observers nationwide demanding clearer answers from authorities.



Wells, a promising student-athlete and wide receiver at Southwest Mississippi Community College, disappeared on July 4, 2026, during a Fourth of July boat trip with friends to the popular barrier island off Mississippi's Gulf Coast. His body was discovered two days later on July 6 by a National Park Service ranger, face down near the shoreline.

Inconclusive Autopsy Raises New Concerns

On July 22, civil rights attorney Ben Crump, representing Wells' family, announced the results of an independent autopsy performed by Dr. Roger Mitchell, a respected forensic pathologist and president of the National Medical Association. The report listed both the cause and manner of death as "undetermined" pending further investigation.

Dr. Mitchell found no fractures, deep tissue injuries, or lacerations. However, he noted a significant area of red discoloration in the soft tissue on the back of Wells' head (roughly 8–12 inches), which he described as inconclusive and worthy of additional review. Crucially, the pathologist stated he could not rule out non-accidental factors contributing to or causing the death.

The examination faced major limitations: key structures from the state autopsy (including neck organs, trachea, and hyoid bone) were unavailable, and advanced decomposition further complicated findings. As a result, Dr. Mitchell could not confirm whether Wells drowned, whether water was present in his airways, or if he had neck injuries or a brain bleed.

- The independent report outlined seven key unanswered questions, including:
 - Why and how did Wells enter the water?
 - What was his body position when found?
 - Was there water in his airway?
 - Any evidence of neck injuries or brain bleed?
 - What were his stomach contents and toxicology results?
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More Unanswered Questions Fuel Doubts In Nolan Wells' Death

Conflicting Accounts and Lingering Mysteries

- Family members and Crump have highlighted several inconsistencies in witness statements: Conflicting reports about whether Wells intended to stay on the island or return with the group.
- Why Wells' cellphone was not with him (his family reportedly located it via tracking apps).
- The absence of any witnesses seeing him struggle or drown despite the crowded holiday setting.
- Reports of a possible altercation on the island, including audio of raised voices.

Authorities with the Jackson County Sheriff's Office initially stated no foul play was suspected, but the investigation continues. The official state autopsy results and toxicology reports have not been publicly released, with the case expected to go before a grand jury.



A Community Seeking Transparency

Wells' parents, Christine Wonsley and Elmore Wonsley, have expressed deep frustration and a desire for full transparency. "The only question we have is, 'What happened to our son?'" his mother has said.

The case has drawn national attention, with involvement from figures like Rev. Al Sharpton and Colin Kaepernick (who helped fund the independent autopsy). It has also sparked broader conversations about trust in investigations, especially given Mississippi's history.

As the investigation proceeds, Wells' family and supporters continue to call for the release of all evidence, including full toxicology results, witness statements, and any video or photo footage from the island. The Real News Louisiana will continue to follow this developing story and provide updates as more information becomes available. Our thoughts remain with Nolan's family during this difficult time.

COMMUNITY EVENTS



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