



THE REAL NEWS

Louisiana

"A Community With a Voice Shall Be Heard" ®

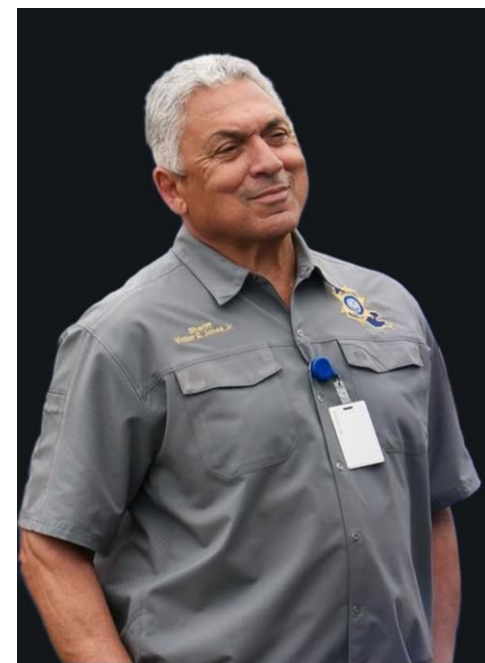
Publisher: Latorria Freeman

Krewe of Excellence Names Former Sheriff Victor Jones Jr. as 2026 Mardi Gras Grand Marshal

Mardi Gras in Louisiana is more than a festival—it's a vibrant celebration of community, culture, and leadership. Each year, krewes across the state select grand marshals to lead their parades, honoring individuals who embody excellence, service, and dedication to their communities. In 2026, the Krewe of Excellence chose former Natchitoches Parish Sheriff Victor Jones Jr. as its grand marshal. This decision highlights the deep connections between law enforcement, public service, and Louisiana's Carnival traditions.

Victor Jones Jr. served as Sheriff of Natchitoches Parish for over two decades, first elected in 1999 and re-elected multiple times with overwhelming support, including 91% in his final campaign. His law enforcement career spanned more than 43 years, starting as a dispatcher and patrol deputy in 1977. Known for his approachable style and commitment to listening to constituents, Jones successfully advocated for tax measures to fund essential sheriff's department services, earning widespread trust across the parish. In 2011, he was inducted into the Louisiana Criminal Justice Hall of Fame for integrating community and youth programs into law enforcement. Upon retiring in 2020, Jones left a legacy of professionalism and community-focused policing. Even in retirement, he remains active in local life, often seen supporting his grandchildren at sporting events—a testament to his grounded, family-oriented values.

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Krewe of Excellence Names Former Sheriff Victor Jones Jr. as 2026 Mardi Gras Grand Marshal



The grand marshal, former Sheriff Victor Jones Jr., will lead the parade and set the tone for the festivities. This honorary position goes to a distinguished figure who has made significant contributions to the Natchitoches community, the state of Louisiana, and the culture. By choosing a respected former law enforcement official like Jones, the Krewe of Excellence underscores themes of integrity, safety, and community protection—values that resonate deeply during public celebrations like Mardi Gras.

Selecting former Sheriff Victor Jones as grand marshal carries profound significance:

Honoring Public Service: Jones's long career exemplifies selfless dedication. In a state where sheriffs play pivotal roles in rural and parish communities, this honor bridges law enforcement with cultural traditions, reminding revelers of the quiet work that keeps communities safe year-round.

Community Excellence: The Krewe of Excellence, like many Louisiana krewes, emphasizes uplifting local achievements. Jones's hall of fame recognition and successful leadership align perfectly with a krewe dedicated to celebrating outstanding contributions.

Inspiration for the Future: Parades are intergenerational events. Having a figure like Jones at the forefront inspires younger generations to pursue careers in public service while highlighting the importance of community engagement.

Regional Pride: Natchitoches Parish, with its rich history and proximity to other Mardi Gras hotspots, adds a layer of statewide representation. This choice fosters unity across Louisiana's diverse landscape.

As the Krewe of Excellence prepares to roll in 2026, former Sheriff Victor Jones's role as grand marshal will symbolize the parade's core message: true excellence comes from service, humility, and unwavering commitment to others. In the spirit of Mardi Gras, it's a reminder that behind the beads, floats, and music are the people who make Louisiana's communities thrive. *Laissez les bons temps rouler!*



Crime Stoppers in Natchitoches: Your Anonymous Voice for a Safer Community

Natchitoches, Louisiana, has its own dedicated Crime Stoppers of Natchitoches, Inc., a community-supported nonprofit organization that partners with local law enforcement to solve and prevent crimes. Launched with support from the City of Natchitoches and private donors, this program empowers residents to report information anonymously while being eligible for cash rewards.

Crime Stoppers of Natchitoches ensures your identity is always protected:

- No names, no recordings, no caller ID.
- Tips receive a unique code for follow-up.
- If your information leads to an arrest, you can claim a cash reward up to \$2,000 (depending on the crime's severity—recent reports mention rewards from \$250 to \$2,000).

Submit tips easily:

- Call the hotline: (318) 238-2388
- Download the P3 Tips app (available on iOS and Android)
- Submit online at p3tips.com or through the official site.

Visit the official website: natchitochescrimestoppers.com for more details. For non-anonymous reports of suspicious activity, contact NPD directly at (318) 352-8101.

Together, Natchitoches residents can build an even safer community. One anonymous call could change everything—pick up the phone or open the app if you know something.

PROTECT OUR COMMUNITY.

SEE SOMETHING. SAY SOMETHING.

318-238-2388



P3TIPS.COM

FOR MORE INFO VISIT [NATCHITOCHESCRIMESTOPPERS.COM](https://natchitochescrimestoppers.com)



Service, Scholarship, and Sisterhood: Mu Omega Zeta Chapter Caps Year with Impactful December Initiatives

NATCHITOCHES, LA — Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., Mu Omega Zeta Chapter, dedicated the month of December to impactful community outreach and scholarly support. Through a series of diverse initiatives, the chapter successfully fulfilled its mission of service while further strengthening its foundational bonds of sisterhood.

A Legacy of Service

The chapter kicked off the month on Dec. 3 with a **Community Baby Shower**, a joint effort between Mu Omega Zeta and the Amicae of Natchitoches. As a signature Z-HOPE (Zetas Helping Other People Excel) activity, the shower serves as vital outreach for expectant mothers who may be low-income or lack traditional support systems.

In alignment with the sorority's commitment to Prematurity Awareness, the chapter partnered with local churches to collect 781 baby items, all of which were donated to the **Women's Resource Center** in Natchitoches.

On Dec. 16, the focus shifted to domestic violence awareness with the presentation of "**All Things Purple.**" Benefiting Project Celebration, this initiative aimed to nurture supportive spaces for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. By supporting Project Celebration's mission of restoration, Mu Omega Zeta reaffirmed its commitment to standing against violence.

Honoring those who served, members gathered on Dec. 8 at the **Northwest Louisiana Veterans Cemetery** in Keithville for the Annual Wreath Laying Event. Participating in the nationwide Wreaths Across America tradition, the chapter placed wreaths on the graves of fallen soldiers to remember the fallen and honor their sacrifice.

Investing in Scholarship

Education remains a cornerstone of the sorority's mission. On Dec. 20, the chapter hosted its **3rd Annual Scholarship Fundraiser**, the "Sneakers & Secrets" Harlem Nights Masquerade Ball. The event supports Mu Omega Zeta's robust scholarship program, which provides financial assistance to students demonstrating academic excellence and leadership potential, easing the burden of higher education costs for the next generation.

Continued next page...



Service, Scholarship, and Sisterhood: Mu Omega Zeta Chapter Caps Year with Impactful December Initiatives

Celebrating Sisterhood and Legacy

The month's festivities reached a grand crescendo on December 22 as the community gathered to honor **Yalaunda Toliver Taylor**, Southern Region Life Member Coordinator, on her retirement. The evening served as a vibrant tribute to Mrs. Taylor's **distinguished 32-year legacy in education**, a career that touched lives for 25 years in Memphis and seven years across Natchitoches and Caddo Parishes.

The celebration was enriched by heartfelt reflections and tributes from:

- **The National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa Inc.** (Beta Alpha Chapter)
- **Mt. Ollie Chapter #58 Order of the Eastern Star**
- **Minister Brenda Sarpy** of North Star MBC
- **Christine Stringer**, 16th Louisiana State Director of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.
- Former administrator and colleague **Sandy Irchirl** and **Consuella Sibley**

Finally, on Dec. 28, Mu Omega Zeta proudly celebrated **77 years of friendship and service with the Amicae**. For more than seven decades, the Zeta Amicae have stood as a steadfast pillar within the sisterhood, preserving the Zeta legacy and exemplifying a spirit of advocacy that remains a treasure to Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated. Mu Omega Zeta Chapter celebrates its Amicae affiliate group for their unwavering support, unity, and love.

About Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. was founded in 1920 on the campus of Howard University. The Mu Omega Zeta Chapter continues to uphold the sorority's ideals of Service, Scholarship, Sisterly Love, and Finer Womanhood within the Natchitoches community.

Pictures of each event: Prematurity Sunday & Community Baby Shower



Pictured from left to right:

Amica Doryce Polk, Linda Jones, Linda Howard, Sandra Williams, Mary Calhoun, Pastor Thomas Carter, Candance Grayson, President, Carletta Jones, Belinda Turner, Amica Melva Mitchell

Women Resource Staff



Pictured left to right:

Carletta Jones, Sandra Williams, Linda Howard, Candance Grayson, President, Sharon Blake, Belinda Turner

Continued next page...



Service, Scholarship, and Sisterhood: Mu Omega Zeta Chapter Caps Year with Impactful December Initiatives

All Things Purple

Carletta Jones, Linda Howard, Shaye Walker, PCI Outreach Coordinator, Alice Johnson, Katrina Braden Amicae President, Mary Calhoun, Candance Grayson, Mu Omega Zeta President, Doryce Polk, Sandra Williams, Belinda Turner

Alice Johnson, Katrina Braden, President, Shaye Walker, PCI Outreach Coordinator, Doryce Polk, Barbara Smith



Wreath Laying



Pic L/R (Belinda Turner, Linda Howard, Candance Grayson, President, Lockey Reliford



Pictured left to right:

Barbara Smith, Chaplain, LaTanya Toliver, Vice President, Katrina Braden, President, Doryce Polk, Past President, Melva Mitchell, Treasurer



Yalaunda T Taylor



**BOM**
Bank**Gives Back***Congratulations*
SARAH GIANNONE**Natchitoches:**

BOM Bank is thrilled to announce her promotion of Sarah Giannone to Retail Regional Manager! Sarah's exceptional leadership, dedication, and passion for supporting her team and members have truly set her apart.

We can't wait to see her continue to shine and make an incredible impact across our region. Congrats, Sarah!

Bossier/Caddo:

BOM was proud to sponsor the Gemini Golf Tournament! The Krewe of Gemini has been promoting the Mardi Gras spirit throughout the Ark-La-Tex since 1989. Their annual parade and Bal have grown into cherished traditions enjoyed by thousands of residents and visitors—bringing excitement and generating millions for the Shreveport-Bossier community each year. Pictured left to right: BOM's Clint Oliver, Jonathan Wall, Drew Baker, Herb Doughty, and Cole Horton.

**Rapides:**

Happy 5-Year Work Anniversary at BOM Bank, Leah Verheyden!

Join us in celebrating Leah Verheyden, who is marking five amazing years with BOM Bank as a dedicated Loan Assistant at our 5924 Coliseum Boulevard location in Alexandria! Leah, thank you for your hard work, positive spirit, and commitment to our customers and team. We are so grateful for everything you do and proud to celebrate this milestone with you!

*Celebrating 5 Years*
LEAH VERHEYDEN

2026
*Happy
New Year*

**BOM**
Bank

LSMSA to Host Open House for Prospective Students and Families

The Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts (LSMSA) will host an Open House on Monday, January 19, 2026, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Prospective students and their families are invited to tour the campus, explore LSMSA's living-learning environment, and hear from current students and staff.



"We encourage families across Louisiana to join us and discover the exceptional resources and opportunities available to high school students in our state," said Emily Shumate, Director of Enrollment Management and Outreach. "LSMSA offers a unique educational experience that combines college-level academics with a supportive residential community. There is no better way to understand what makes our school special than visiting campus and meeting our students, faculty, and staff."

The Open House is recommended for students currently in eighth grade or higher; younger siblings may attend, however, they should accompany their parents to all parent activities. Registration is required and can be completed at www.LSMSA.edu/visit

ABOUT LSMSA

The Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts (LSMSA) is a tuition-free, public high school for high-achieving sophomores, juniors, and seniors with a nominal room and board fee to cover housing, meals, and campus activities. The LSMSA Foundation offers assistance for families so that no eligible student is denied the school's 42-year legacy of a college-level living/learning experience.

For more information about LSMSA, visit www.LSMSA.edu.





Get Ready to Crawl for a Cause: The 11th Annual FAUNA Pub Crawl in Natchitoches

Natchitoches is preparing for the 11th Annual St. Patrick's Day Pub Crawl, organized by Friends All United for Natchitoches Animals (FAUNA). This popular fundraiser supports local animal welfare efforts, combining downtown festivities with a mission to help homeless and neglected animals.

The Pub Crawl began over ten years ago and quickly became a favorite local event. Proceeds have funded animal care, spay/neuter programs, adoptions, and a new Pet Adoption & Welfare Center.

The 2026 event, which will be held on March 14, 2026, will feature the classic highlights:

- Multiple stops at downtown bars and restaurants with drink and food specials.
- Poker Run with prize opportunities.
- Costume contest with prizes for best outfits.
- Live music, food trucks, and a festive riverbank atmosphere.
- Swag for registered participants (21+).

Festivities run from 4 to 10 p.m., ending with a party and prize announcements. FAUNA rescues animals from high-kill shelters and finds them homes, with the Pub Crawl funding essential care and services. Mark your calendar for March 14, 2026, join the fun, and help support local animals.

For updates and registration, visit npfauna.org.



New Ownership Announced for Winnfield Memorial Funeral Home in Natchitoches and Winnfield, Louisiana

Natchitoches and Winnfield, LA – January 7, 2026 – Winnfield Memorial Funeral Home, LLC, serving Natchitoches and Winn Parishes, announces new ownership effective immediately. The funeral homes in both Natchitoches and Winnfield are now under new ownership, dedicated to upholding the legacy of exceptional service.

The new owner, Paula Forest, expresses gratitude to the staff, families, and community for their ongoing support and trust. Winnfield Memorial Funeral Home remains committed to providing dignified and compassionate service, continuing the tradition founded by Ben D. Johnson in 1932. "Because We Care!" remains the guiding motto.

The new owner requests continued support and invites families to contact Winnfield Memorial Funeral Home when needed.



For more information, contact:
Winnfield Memorial Funeral Home
(Natchitoches): (318) 352-4404

Winnfield Funeral Home
(Winnfield): (318) 628-3561
Website:
www.winnfieldmemorialfh.com



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Photo Tribute to Community Legend Ben D. Johnson Jr.

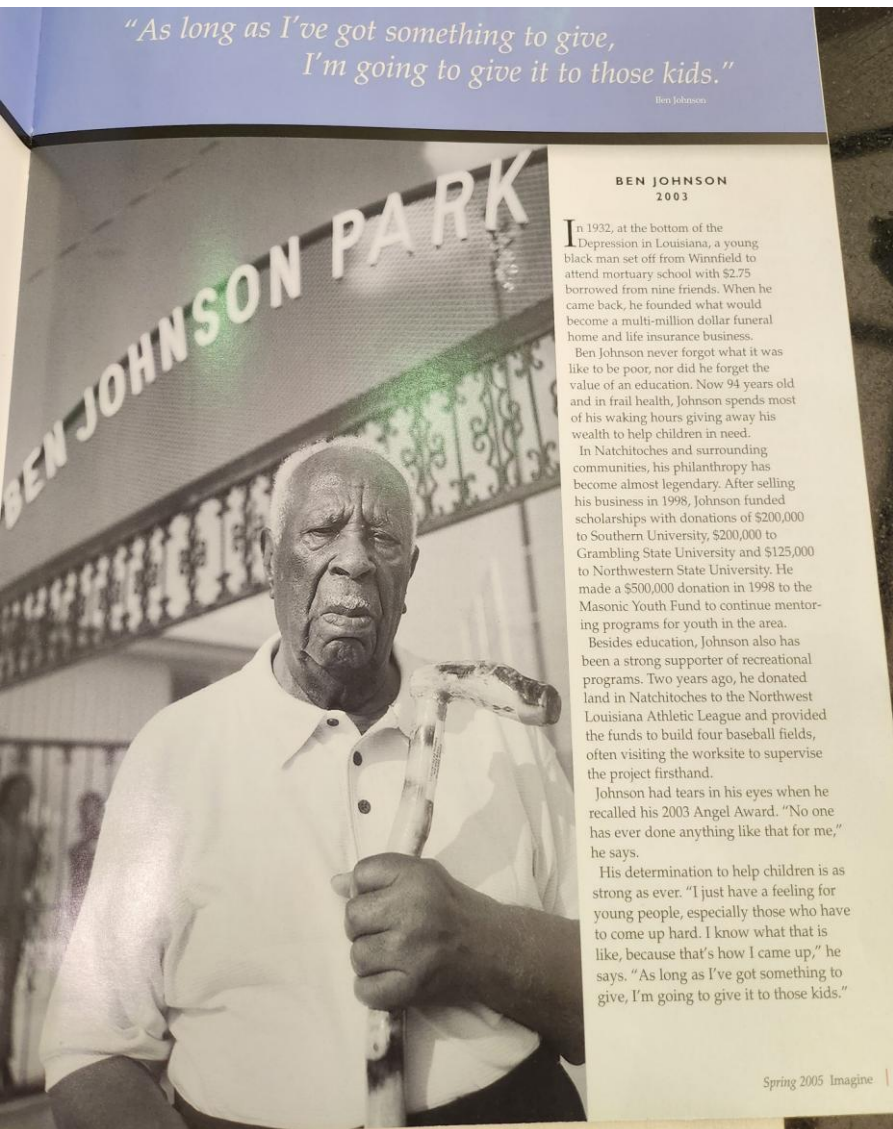
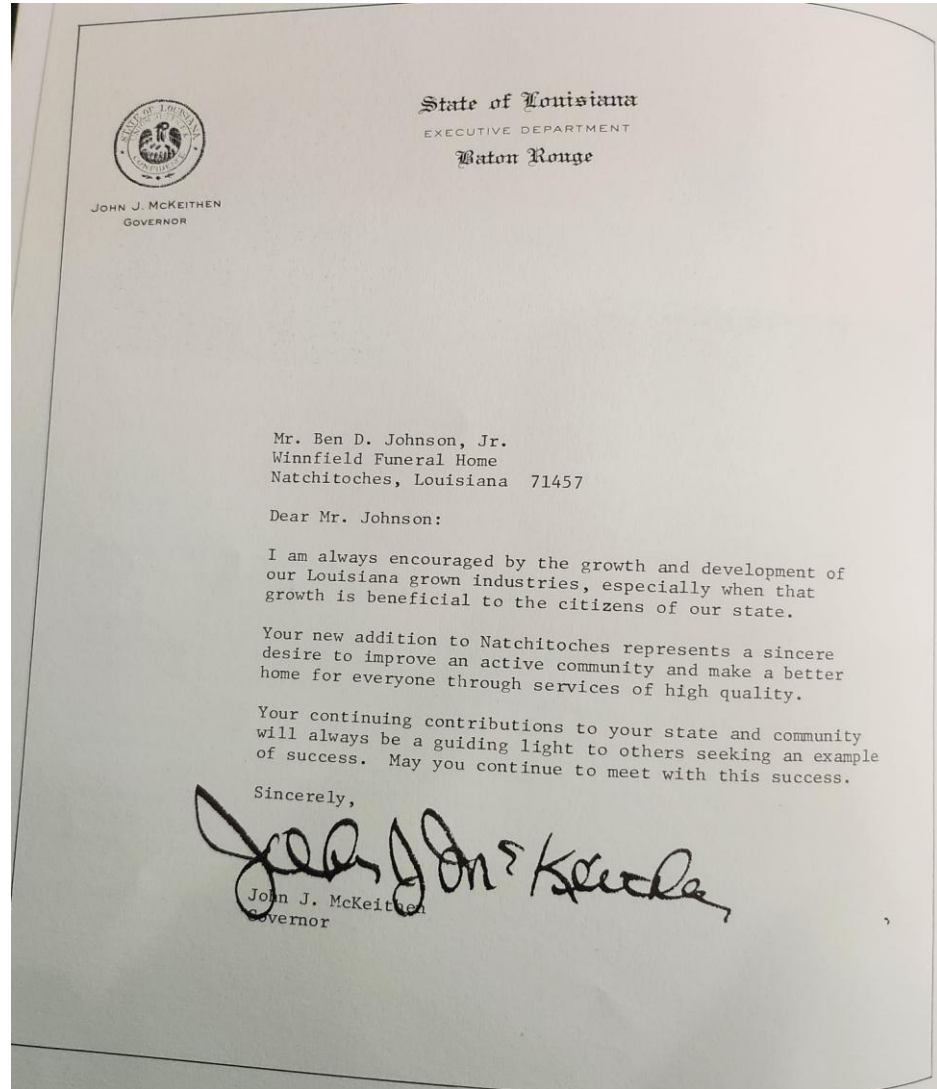
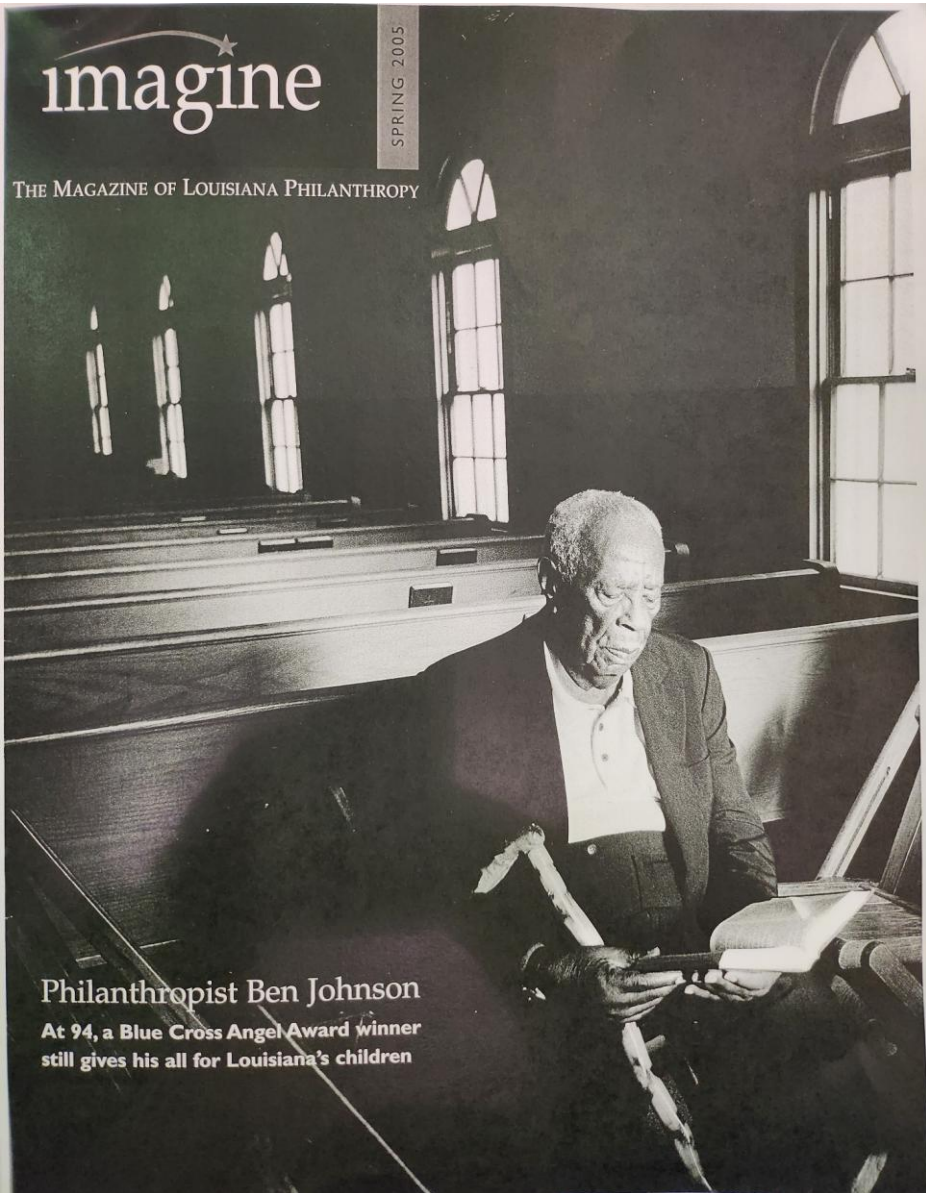


Photo Tribute to Community Legend Ben D. Johnson Jr.

A Dream Realized . . .

A little extra determination, a little extra work a little extra concern for people, a little extra faith, and a little extra love—these put together in a single living combination have been the 36-year history of the ever growing Winnfield Funeral System and the Winnfield Life Insurance Company.

That the combination has proved successful is evident from the fact that, truly beginning with nothing, the Founder has almost single-handedly put together a large, multi-faceted organization which is one of the most constructive to be found anywhere. An organization whose total assets in 1969 are approaching the \$3,000,000.00 mark.

An organization giving employment to approximately 200 persons, the greatest such number by a single, privately-owned minority group enterprise in the State of Louisiana.

An organization which pays out \$500,000.00 annually in agent's commissions alone.

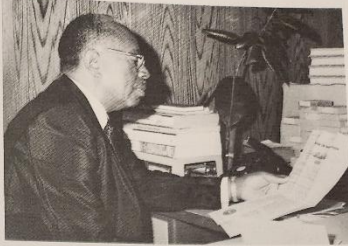
An organization with an annual premium income of approximately \$600,000.00.

An organization providing nearly \$1,000,000.00 in mortgage support to various homeowners, businesses, and religious and fraternal groups.

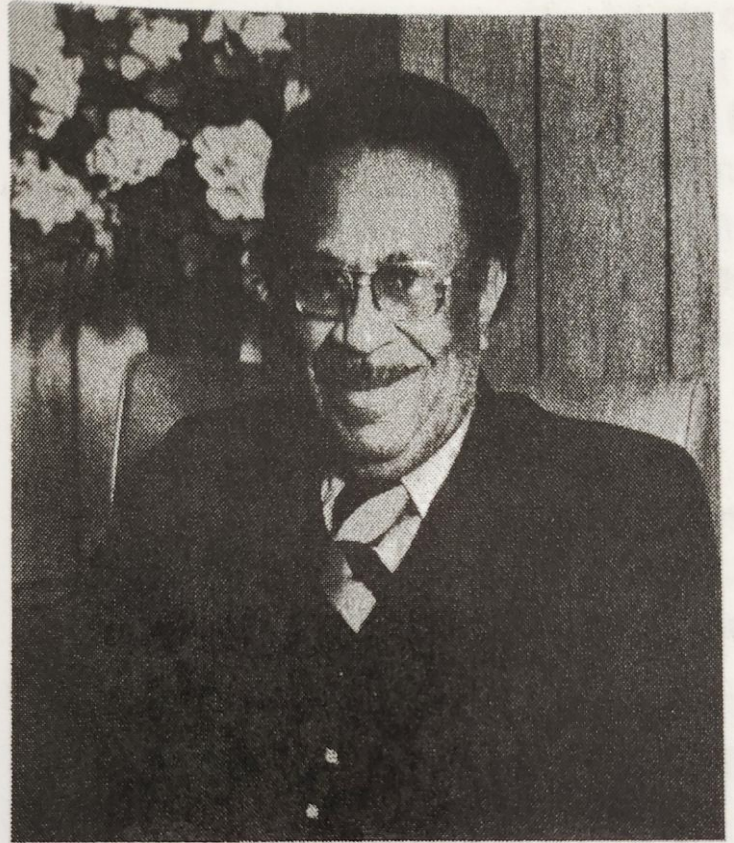
But if this were all to the story Winnfield Life would consider it just another perhaps revealing and interesting but rather cold-blooded business success story. Instead the firm has always considered itself a part of, one with, and belonging in a real sense to the people it serves.

Hence, it has not left untouched in its area of operation any worthwhile youth activity, civic cause, humanitarian movement, and its direct concern and involvement with many individual lives. The President/Founder is well known for his devoting regularly seventy-five percent of his time to outside affairs, and an unwritten but oftspoken rule among all the firm's executive officers and the staff is *the people first*.

Founded in Winnfield, La. in April, 1933 and then known as the Winnfield Colored Burial Association, Winnfield Life began simply as a community organization, primarily to meet a crucial need resulting from the lack of adequate service in its field from fraternal organizations. No thought of expansion was in mind at that time.



BEN D. JOHNSON, SR.



Mr. Ben D. Johnson

Successor of Dr. E. A. Johnson in the founding and leading of registration and voting in Natchitoches Parish. A highly successful businessman known throughout the nation, Mr. Johnson yet provides the League with the benefit of his wise council. He is founder and President of the Natchitoches Parish Voters & Civic League which was incorporated late in 1966.



MRS. GLADYS JOHNSON
(In Memoriam)



BEN D. JOHNSON, JR.



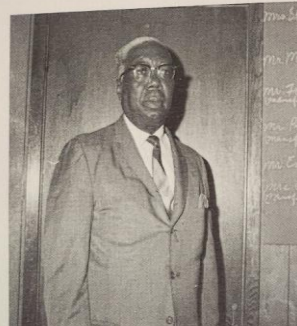
Urbach Collection, Box 18, 1964, CHRC

IN CASKET FACTORY . . .

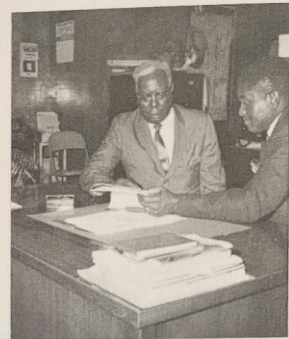
Orie Petite

Production Line

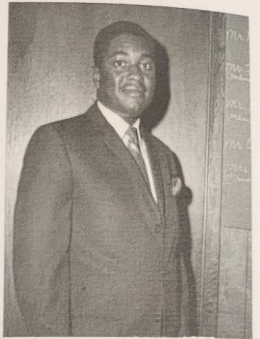
Roy LaCour



JAMES GRAYSON, Mortician



J. W. SCARBOROUGH



JOE DODD, Custodian



ALTON BURTON

Louisiana's "Touch Law": The Hands-Free Driving Regulation Explained



Louisiana's "**Touch Law**", formally an expansion of the state's hands-free driving statute, prohibits drivers from physically holding or touching handheld wireless devices while operating a vehicle. Enacted through House Bill 519 in 2025, this law took effect on August 1, 2025, with full enforcement commencing on January 1, 2026. It aims to combat distracted driving—a leading cause of accidents and a contributing factor to rising auto insurance rates in the state. Previously, Louisiana banned texting and social media use while driving, but allowed holding phones for calls. The new rule broadens restrictions: drivers cannot hold, touch, swipe, or manually manipulate cell phones or similar devices for any purpose, including calls, texting, scrolling, or watching videos. This makes Louisiana one of over 30 states with comprehensive hands-free laws, often nicknamed "no-touch" or "touch laws."

"Key Provisions Prohibited Actions" — Holding or physically supporting the device with any body part while the vehicle is in motion or temporarily stopped (e.g., at traffic lights).

• **Allowed Uses** — Hands-free operations, such as Bluetooth, voice commands, mounted GPS navigation (viewing only, no touching), or wrist devices like Apple Watches for calls.

• **Exceptions** — Emergencies (e.g., calling 911), law enforcement/first responders on duty, or when the vehicle is safely parked (not just stopped in traffic).

• The law applies statewide, overriding varying local ordinances for uniformity. It is a **primary enforcement offense** in some contexts but generally secondary, meaning officers can ticket for it if observed during a stop for another violation—though direct pulls are possible under the expanded rules. **Penalties and Enforcement: First offense** — Up to \$100–\$250 fine (higher in school zones or construction areas).

• **Repeat offenses** — Fines up to \$500, potential license points, or community service.

• **No jail time** for standard violations, but enhanced penalties if it contributes to injury or fatality.

Advocates argue it saves lives, noting distracted driving causes thousands of crashes annually. Critics initially worried about pretextual stops, leading to compromises preventing searches solely based on this violation. As of January 2026, with the grace period ended, drivers must adapt: mount phones, use car integrations like Apple CarPlay, or pull over safely. This "Touch Law" promotes safer roads, potentially lowering insurance costs long-term.

OPINION**Black Wall Street: A Legacy of Prosperity, Destruction, and Resilience****By: Ava Black**

Black Wall Street refers to the Greenwood District in Tulsa, Oklahoma—a thriving African American community in the early 20th century that symbolized Black economic self-sufficiency and excellence during the Jim Crow era. In the 1910s and 1920s, Greenwood boasted over 300 Black-owned businesses, including luxury shops, restaurants, theaters, hotels, banks, newspapers, a hospital, and even a bustling aviation sector. Entrepreneurs like O.W. Gurley, who restricted land sales to Black buyers, and the Williams family built a self-contained economy where dollars circulated within the community. Coined by Booker T. Washington as "Negro Wall Street," it represented hope and achievement amid segregation.

This prosperity ended tragically in the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre (May 31–June 1). Sparked by a false accusation against a Black man, Dick Rowland, a white mob—deputized and armed by officials—attacked Greenwood. Planes dropped incendiaries, homes and businesses were looted and burned, and up to 300 people were killed. Over 35 blocks were destroyed, leaving 10,000 homeless. It remains one of the worst incidents of racial violence in U.S. history.

Residents rebuilt in the 1930s–1940s, but urban renewal and highways later displaced much of the area—a "second destruction." Today, Greenwood is revitalizing with sites like the Greenwood Rising History Center, Black-owned businesses, and events honoring the legacy. Efforts focus on entrepreneurship, tourism, and reconciliation, though reparations claims were recently denied by courts.

The spirit of Black Wall Street inspires modern Black economic movements nationwide, from hubs in Atlanta and Chicago to initiatives closing the racial wealth gap. It reminds us of Black resilience and the ongoing fight for equity.



Photo credit: Ebony.org

Breaking the Cycle: Being Kind Doesn't Cost a Thing

By: Author Shelia Pierre



Bullying will never be a normal thing, but it will always be the wrong thing. This happens all over the world in all kinds of places. Children and adults can be bullied, and they can be bullies. These actions shouldn't have a place in schools, homes, friendships, or the workforce. We have to be careful with labeling someone as a bully. The person could just be mean. In the past, I had to tell a child that very thing: she wasn't being bullied, someone was just being unkind to her at that moment. Bullying is a completely different thing.

A Google search defines bullying as the repeated and intentional use of words or actions against someone or a group of people to cause distress and risk to their well-being. These actions are usually carried out by people who have more influence or power over others, or who want to make someone else feel less powerful or helpless. In my view, the definition describes someone who is miserable. To put that much energy into hurting someone's feelings, making them afraid, and trying to control them speaks to the person's true character. Hurt people try to hurt other people.

There have been countless news stories about children being bullied and how it has affected them mentally. Some children no longer wanted to attend school; they became depressed and tried to do the unthinkable. Sadly, some children have hurt themselves, and that should never be the case. There are adults on social media who verbally attack others for whatever reason. Recently, I read and listened to a story on YouTube about a popular influencer who took her life after constant verbal attacks about her looks and mental state. She clearly stated she was tired, and instead of the person trying to encourage her not to do anything to herself, the person basically agreed with her.

If your children are being bullied at school, don't let it slide, don't tell them to toughen up, don't leave them feeling like it's not a big deal. Eventually, they will start to feel afraid and be mentally affected. We know what could happen down the line. Seek counseling for them before it's too late. Talk to your children about not hurting others, physically or verbally. Let them know that nobody deserves to be treated unkindly. Ask them this question: "Would you like someone to do that to you?" ***Continued next page...***



Continued from Page 16...

Breaking the Cycle: Being Kind Doesn't Cost a Thing

By: Author Shelia Pierre

We can live by and teach the "golden rule" to our children. Matthew 7:12 "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." This verse, known as the Golden Rule, summarizes the core ethical teaching of the Old Testament, emphasizing treating others with the same consideration and kindness you would want for yourself, reflecting God's will and the essence of biblical law and prophecy. We can train them up in the way they should go, but in this life, they will still make bad choices. We must continue teaching them to be kind.



My plan was to write about something totally different. I was finished, but I could hear the word "bullying" in my spirit. So, I had to start an entirely different article. I feel confident God wanted me to write on this subject for a time such as this. Men, women, boys, and girls....Please be kind to others. We never know what people are dealing with. Do not add to their struggles. If you can't be kind, just be quiet.

The

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OUR FIRST BABY OF 2026

Ah'Lani

January 1, 2026 • 10:29 AM



The Best Resolution is PREVENTION

The start of the New Year is the perfect time to put your health first. Small steps can make a big difference. Staying active, eating well, and keeping up with routine health screenings can help catch concerns early and plan an important role in staying healthy.

Start the year strong and schedule your recommended health screenings today – because prevention matters.

To find a provider near you, visit [NRMCHospital.org](https://www.NRMCHospital.org).

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CERVICAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

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NSU opens Demons for Recovery Lounge to support wellness and success

NATCHITOCHES – Northwestern State University has an extra measure of support in place for students in addiction recovery with the opening of the Demons for Recovery Lounge, a space dedicated to supporting student wellness and recovery.

A ribbon-cutting for the Demons for Recovery Lounge took place Jan. 7, bringing to fruition months of coordination to furnish a location for peer support groups, meetings, quiet study and connection.



College Recovery and Prevention Programs (CRPPs) are a growing initiative that addresses student health, wellness and success. NSU is one of nine schools in Louisiana and about 180 across the nation to have created a CRPP and is a member of the Association of Recovery in Higher Education. Demons for Recovery is housed within the Department of Psychology and Addiction Studies, which is part of the Gallaspy College of Education and Human Development.

“Since we are brand new, we get a lot of questions about what this is...is it counseling, is it a club, what do we do?” said Sarah Ebarb, CRPP program coordinator. “We will be a peer support community. We want to shift the focus from punishment to support and from stigma to understanding. We will have a space for our members to come together and collaborate for meetings and general support.”

That support can be a lifesaver for students making the transition from a home environment to a college environment. Statistics indicate that one in five college students meets the criteria for substance abuse disorder while less than 10 percent receive help.

“Students struggling with substance issues often miss class, have lower grades and withdraw from school, so our impacts are higher retention rates, higher GPAs and higher graduation rates,” Ebarb said.

“Studies show that nearly 90 percent of students who are involved with a collegiate recovery program graduate. Supportive recovery environments also reduce relapse risk.”

Students will also have access to resources that improve mental health outcomes, such as referrals to mental health counselors and other professionals if they need more help.

Continued next page...

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FINANCING AVAILABLE

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Saturday 9 am- 1 pm
Sunday Closed

Continued from Page 16...

NSU opens Demons for Recovery Lounge to support wellness and success

NSU identified the need for a collegiate recovery program through national data, campus mental health trends, and feedback from students and faculty. Supported by the grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents, Demons for Recovery will offer weekly peer support group meetings, educational seminars, sober social and outreach events, and scholarships.

The Demons for Recovery Lounge is located in Student Union Room 313. Ebarb credited Dr. Neeru Deep, dean of the College of Education and Human Development, as well as the Demons for Recovery pilot team, for their contributions to the project. Those individuals are Dr. Susan Barnett, Dr. Billie Myers, Interim Department Chair Dr. Charles King, and Hillary Bennett, a recent graduate of the Master's program.

Information on Demons for Recovery is available at www.nsula.edu/crpp and by emailing crpp@nsula.edu.

Demons for Recovery Lounge:

A ribbon-cutting officially opened the Demons for Recovery Lounge in NSU Student Room 313. From left are Dr. Neeru Deep, dean of NSU's Gallaspy College of Education and Human Development; graduate assistant Kabrian Francois of Lake Charles, Drake Owens, Chief of Staff to the president; Sarah Ebarb, Demons for Recovery coordinator, Dr. Charles King, interim head of the Department of Psychology and Addiction Studies, NSU President James Genovese and Hillary Bennett, a recent Master's degree graduate who contributed to coordinating NSU's College Recovery and Prevention Program.

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For Non-Emergency assistance, dial 352-6432

For Administration, dial 357-7800

For Investigations, dial 357-7830

For Civil Process and Property Tax Collection, dial 352-4104

For the Natchitoches Parish Detention Center, dial 357-9300

We are ALWAYS here for you.

Reactivation of Natchitoches Parish Port Truck Dump and Conveyor System Strengthens Regional Forestry Supply Chain

Natchitoches, LA, January 7, 2026: A major infrastructure upgrade at the Natchitoches Parish Port is giving new strength to Louisiana's forestry economy, with the port's rehabilitated truck dump and wood chip conveyor system now online and moving residual wood chips by rail to national buyers. Supported by Louisiana Capital Outlay funding and operated in partnership with Kisatchie Chips, the upgraded system is helping stabilize mill operations across Central and North Louisiana.

The project emerged in late February following the closure of the International Paper mill in Campti, when Governor Landry, Secretaries Bourgeois and Schowen, state legislators, and regional business and community leaders met in Natchitoches Parish to assess the economic impact and identify critical needs for keeping the sector viable.

Among the highest priorities was restoring reliable outlets for the movement of residual wood chips from area mills to national markets. That discussion set the pathway for the state-funded rehabilitation that ultimately brought the truck dump and conveyor system back into operation.

This existing infrastructure at the port has now been modernized through the installation of a new rail car loading radial stacker conveyor and the full rehabilitation of the truck dump and conveyor system, enabling high-volume, efficient rail loading. The system became operational in early November, and the Natchitoches Parish Port holds the primary agreement with Kisatchie Chips, which is contracted out by International Paper to manage day-to-day transloading operations.

Residual chips handled through the port will originate primarily from RoyOMartin's Chopin plywood facility, the largest plywood mill in North America. Maintaining reliable outlets for these residual materials is essential to sustaining production levels at Chopin and supporting the broader forestry supply chain.

At this time, RoyOMartin is expected to transport approximately 35–36 truckloads of chips each week, most of which will be transported by rail out of state.

The truck dump and conveyor system also positions the port to support additional mills and new users, including companies evaluating the facility for potential barge shipments of bark fuel to northeastern markets.

Laura Lyles, Executive Director of the Natchitoches Economic Development Alliance (NEDA), noted the significance of this project for long-term regional competitiveness. "The Natchitoches Parish Port is one of the most important economic tools in our parish's development portfolio," Lyles said. "Seeing this project come to life demonstrates what becomes possible when partners align around shared priorities and when the state invests in infrastructure that directly supports business continuity and growth.

Continued next page...



Photo Credit: Natchitoches Parish Port

A promotional graphic for Natchitoches Economic Development Alliance (NEDA). The background is a gradient of blue. At the top, there is a logo for the Natchitoches Area Chamber of Commerce. Below it, the text "JOIN TODAY" is written in large, bold, white letters. Underneath that, "FOR AS LITTLE AS" is written in smaller white letters. The largest text is "\$25" in a very large, bold, white font. Below "\$25", the words "A MONTH" are written in white. At the bottom of the graphic, it says "Contact Morgan Green" and "morgan@gonatchitoches.com" in white. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner.

Continued from Page 17...

Reactivation of Natchitoches Parish Port Truck Dump and Conveyor System Strengthens Regional Forestry Supply Chain

This system will serve our mills, our transportation network, and our workforce for years to come.” Travis Tyler, Executive Director of the Natchitoches Parish Port, remarked on the renewed potential the project brings. “This project is a great example of how we can leverage existing infrastructure and partnerships to drive regional growth,” Tyler said. “By bringing this system back online, it helps lift the whole region. When North Louisiana grows, we all grow, and I’m proud to play a small part in that.”

About the Natchitoches Parish Port

The Natchitoches Parish Port is a multimodal industrial center located along the Red River Waterway, offering access to barge, rail, and highway transportation. The port supports regional manufacturing, agriculture, and forestry operations by providing industrial sites, infrastructure, and logistics solutions that enhance economic competitiveness throughout Natchitoches Parish and the surrounding region.

About the Natchitoches Economic Development Alliance

The Natchitoches Economic Development Alliance (NEDA), through a management agreement with the Natchitoches Area Chamber of Commerce, provides leadership and support for economic development and workforce solutions in and around Natchitoches Parish. NEDA is committed to its mission to champion investment, maximize potential, and cultivate growth in Natchitoches Parish.

NSU seeks nominations for CAPA Hall of Fame

NATCHITOCHES – Northwestern State University’s Mrs. H.D. Dear Sr. and Alice E. Dear School of Creative and Performing Arts is seeking nominations for the 2026-2027 CAPA Hall of Fame. The CAPA Hall of Fame was established in 2016 to honor individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to their field and/or CAPA. The Hall of Fame currently has 26 Inductees who represent the four departments in CAPA: Music, Theatre and Dance, Fine and Graphic Arts and New Media, Journalism and Communications Arts.

Nominees must have earned an undergraduate, graduate or honorary degree from the School of Creative and Performing Arts at least 20 years ago or have made significant contributions to their field and the School of Creative and Performing Arts. Nominees may be living or deceased. Letters of nomination must include information on the nominee’s contributions to his or her field and/or to CAPA and additional information that supports the nomination.

The deadline for nominations is May 1, 2026.

To submit a nomination, visit <https://northwesternstatealumni.com/capa-hall-of-fame-nomination/>

Nominations can be submitted to CAPA Director Scott Burrell, 140 Central Ave., Natchitoches, LA 71497.

For more information, email Burrell at nfburrellc@nsula.edu.



Graduating cadets take the oath of commission to serve in the U.S. Army

NATCHITOCHES – Northwestern State University ROTC Cadets Jaylon James of Stonewall and DaMarkus Lawson of Fort Polk took the oath of office to serve as second lieutenants in the U.S. Army as part of commencement exercises on Wednesday. A separate formal ceremony and reception took place on Thursday for family and friends. James graduated with a Bachelor of Science in psychology, a concentration in substance abuse and a minor in military leadership.



He has branched Logistics and will continue to serve in the Louisiana National Guard. He is assigned to the 199th Brigade Support Battalion as the Maintenance Control Officer. Lawson completed his master's degree in Homeland Security the past spring and obtained a minor in military leadership. He has been selected for Adjutant General's Corps and will continue his service on active duty. He will attend Adjutant General Basic Officer Leader Course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Information on NSU's Military Science and Leadership program is available at www.nsu.la/MilitaryScience

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Amplifying Black Voices: The Stakes in Louisiana's 2026 Elections

Democracy is under attack, and Black Americans wield a vital tool to defend it: our vote. As the NAACP's "Power Your Vote" campaign urges, issues like economic justice, healthcare, and voting rights directly impact our communities' ability to thrive. The 2026 midterms on November 3 will decide all U.S. House seats, a U.S. Senate seat, and key local races, shaping policies amid ongoing threats to equitable representation. In Louisiana, these elections carry profound consequences for Black voters, who comprise nearly one-third of the population.



A major redistricting battle looms over the state's congressional map, which currently includes two majority-Black districts—a hard-won gain after federal courts ruled prior maps violated the Voting Rights Act by diluting Black voting power. The U.S. Supreme Court case *Louisiana v. Callais* challenges this map, with arguments signaling potential weakening of Section 2 protections against racial discrimination in districting.

As of early 2026, the current map with two majority-Black districts (including the 6th, held by a Black Democrat) will be used, preserving opportunities for Black-preferred candidates in the House races. However, a future ruling could revert to a single majority-Black district, reducing representation and potentially influencing national House control. Statewide, incumbent Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy faces re-election under Louisiana's new partisan primary system (primaries May 16, general November 3). All six House seats are contested, and shifts in district lines could affect outcomes in deeply divided areas. Locally, here in Natchitoches Parish—home to historic Black communities and Northwestern State University—voters will influence parish-level governance, including potential school board, Parish Commissioner, and municipal races such as the district attorney, city, and district judges. These decisions impact education funding, public safety, and infrastructure, issues disproportionately affecting Black residents who face economic disparities. Black turnout has driven progress, but barriers like strict ID laws and polling changes persist. The NAACP's mobilization efforts, including town halls, aim to counter suppression. Register, verify your status, and vote—report issues to 866-OUR-VOTE. In Louisiana's 2026 elections, our amplified voices can protect gains and demand equity. Let's vote to secure our future.

2026 UPCOMING ELECTIONS

**OPEN CONGRESSIONAL
GENERAL AND OPEN
PRIMARY**
November 3, 2026

GENERAL ELECTION
December 12, 2026

QUALIFYING PERIOD
July 29-31, 2026

OFFICE TITLES	YEARS OF TERM	BEGINNING OF TERM	EXPIRATION OF TERM	DISTRICTS
OPEN GENERAL				
U.S. Senator*	6	1/3/2027	1/3/2033	—
U.S. Representative*	2	1/3/2027	1/3/2029	6
Associate Justice, Supreme Court*	10	1/1/2027	12/31/2036	3
Public Service Commissioner*	6	1/1/2027	12/31/2032	5
OPEN PRIMARY				
				3-1-B
Court of Appeal Judges*	10	1/1/2027	12/31/2036	3-1-C
District Judges	6	1/1/2027	12/31/2032	10th JDC
District Attorney	6	1/11/2027	1/9/2033	10th JDC
School Board Members	4	1/1/2027	12/31/2030	all
Justices of the Peace	6	1/1/2027	12/31/2032	all
Constables (Justice of the Peace Courts)	6	1/1/2027	12/31/2032	all

- Candidates qualify with Secretary of State.
- All other candidates qualify with Clerk of Court.

QUALIFYING PERIOD

JULY 29-31, 2026

2026 UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Important Dates

QUALIFYING PERIOD

July 29-31, 2026

- District Judges
- District Attorney
- School Board Members
- Justice of the Peace
- Constables
- City Court Marshal
- City Court Judge- Ward 1

ELECTION

April 2026

Village of Natchez

- Mayor
- Chief of Police
- Aldermen

QUALIFYING PERIOD

July 29-31, 2026

Mayors of
Natchitoches' Towns
and Villages through
the Parish

CLOSED PARTY RACE

April 2026

- US Senator
- U.S. Representative
- Associate Justice of the Supreme Court
- Public Service Commissioner

COMMUNITY EVENTS

St. Matthew Baptist Church & Abundant Life International Ministry requests your presence on

**JANUARY 25, 2026
AT 2:30 PM**

**PASTORAL
ANNIVERSARY
Celebration**



Guest Preacher
Bishop William Roberson
North Star B. C.
(Powhatan, LA)



LOCATION:
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Dr. Aill R. Harris Jr. - President

**MILKDay
Celebration**

**7PM | Sunday
JAN 18th 2026**



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**Guest Speaker
Dr. F. D. Sampson Sr.**
Friendship Baptist Church - Houston, TX



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