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The Real Views



March 22, 2024

Vol 22 Issue 3

Natchitoches Parish

Ensuring Equal Voting Access:

The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021

By: Latorria Freeman,
Publisher

Access to voting is a foundational principle of democratic society, ensuring that every voice is heard, and every citizen is represented. Despite legal protections such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, black people and communities of color in the United States continue to face severe hindrances to exercising this fundamental civil right. These barriers prolong systemic disparities while undermining the principles of fairness and equality that support democracy.

Equal voting access is a critical civil rights issue, not just a question of convenience. In a democracy, fair and equal representation is essential to ensuring that their elected officials recognize and address all citizens' problems and interests. The Constitution requires that electoral districts be established

based on the concept of "one person, one vote," but discriminatory practices continue, oppressing minority voters and diminishing their political power.

Since the Shelby Supreme Court decision, states have passed a flood of voter suppression legislation that disproportionately harms people of color. These discriminatory measures include unnecessary photo ID legislation, voter registration restrictions, limits to early voting and mail-in ballots, and polling location closures. Furthermore, gerrymandering, or the manipulation of election boundaries for political benefit, reduces the voting power of black and other underprivileged communities.

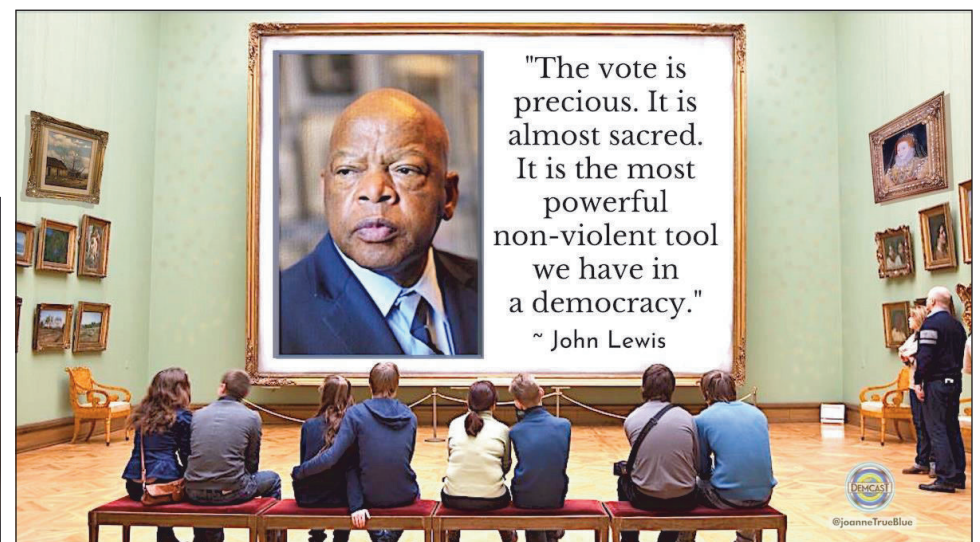
Redistricting, the practice of redrawing electoral district lines to reflect demographic shifts, substantially impacts political representation. However, when done improperly, it can

disenfranchise communities of color by splitting or packing them into districts, thus reducing their voting power. Despite the protections provided by the 1965 Voting Rights Act, several states continue to establish district borders that perpetuate structural inequalities and limit minority voters' political involvement.

The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act addresses these injustices. This act seeks to eliminate racially motivated voting hurdles and guarantee every citizen's right to vote by restoring and improving the Voting Rights Act's protections. It is critical

that Congress prioritize the adoption of this law to protect democratic norms and promote systemic equity.

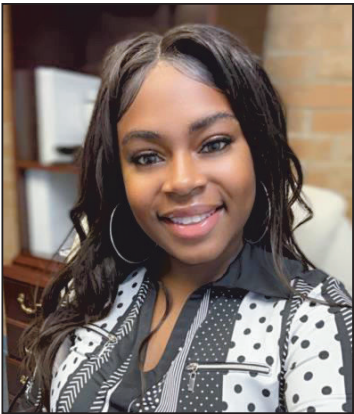
To summarize, equal access to vote is not simply a civil rights problem but also a pillar of democracy. It is critical that all voting barriers, particularly those that disproportionately affect communities of color, be removed so that every citizen can fully engage in the democratic process. The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act provides a critical chance to protect our democracy and move toward a future where every voice is heard and cherished!



The Importance of Voting in the Black Community

By: La'Quinta Scott-Favors

Do you know that your vote is your voice? Do you know changes can be made when a community comes together to vote? Do you know that most of your complaints and concerns could be addressed by just voting? It wasn't a big deal for my generation to vote in the community I was raised in. Have you noticed that we only see things getting done in the black community when it is time to vote? This tactic is one of many reasons our voices need to be heard through voting. The black community is more than being thought about when someone is trying to gain votes; the black community is more than crime; the black community is more than getting paid to be against each other; the black community is more than being looked down



on because we aren't always seeing eye to eye! Do you know that there is unity in numbers? So many of us talk about change, but it's only when the bad comes. Why can't we come together to talk about and be about change positively and for a great cause?

One day, I pray that everyone can get along. I pray that we will vote because we can and not because of monetary gains. I pray that the people of our community take the initiative to update your licenses and IDs with the correct address! We will begin to come together, vote, and drive out crime together instead of watching it happen around us. I pray that our differences as the black community begin to diminish, and our similarities begin to help us grow more.

Together, WE CAN MAKE A CHANGE!

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH-NORTH STREET PRESENTS

SAT 30 MAR

COMMUNITY-WIDE

Easter EGG HUNT!

10A-12P

NATCHITOCES CITY PARK

FOOD | FUN | PRIZES

AGES: 1-12 | MEET UP @ POOL PARKING LOT

The Real Views

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The BREADHOUSE
Nakatosh

Soulicious Food & BB-Q

1202 Texas St, Natchitoches, LA 71457

(318) 214-2400

Open 7 Days a Week Hours 11 am to 7 pm

Vote Harold Bayonne, #33 for Councilman-at-Large

To those who have already placed their votes during the early voting period, or by mail – I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. Taking the time to vote your voice is the only way we see change in our day to day lives.

For those who have not voted yet, and may still be considering who deserves your vote, I hope the following will assist you in your decision.

A large percentage of citizens in our community do not know what a Councilman-at-Large is. They've never heard of the position, and they don't even know the name of the person who currently holds the position. This concerns me greatly.

I'm concerned because this position is a critical position FOR the citizens of Natchitoches. If the position is held by the correct person, and is performed effectively, the Councilman-at-Large is the MAIN voice for the concerns of

EACH and EVERY citizen in the community. He/She is responsible to look out for their best interest, to ensure that they have what they deserve to experience, a quality of life. The Councilman-at-Large doesn't have to manage employees, manage day to day business or worry about budgets. The position is designed to manage the needs of the citizens, maintain awareness of what is happening in the city and to be a liaison between City management and the citizens themselves.

I've dedicated decades to serving the public, starting with the Boy Scouts, then the Military, and various non-profit civic service organizations. The military taught me discipline, like bouncing back after facing challenges. When I say I can take a door slamming in my face and get right back at it – that's where I learned it – in boot camp. I mention this because I truly believe I've spent a lifetime preparing to be the best public

servant for this community.

I see the need for YOU to be heard, I see the need for YOUR rights to be protected, I see the need to have someone who will courageously and boldly fight for YOU. I see the need for each of you to have a person in this position who owns it with every bit of passion in his soul. I see the need to have someone in this position who isn't afraid to say NO when it is necessary and only says yes when it's truly in your best interest. I see the need to have someone in this position who will challenge the council to remember the rights of every person in this community no matter their circumstances, choices, or financial situation.

You have the ability to vote for someone who holds every one of the qualities listed above, me, Harold Bayonne #33, candidate for Councilman-at-Large. I will serve the citizens of this community courageously and boldly. I will be

accessible. You will know my name, my face, my voice and my passion for this City. I will work tirelessly, dedicating myself to ensuring each of my fellow citizens is experiencing the quality of life they deserve.

As future Councilman-at-Large, I am already working towards your best interest; educating myself on how to create an ordinance that states that the Citizens of Natchitoches must be involved in the voting of an increase to their Utilities. We must not permit taxation without representation. Whether you have the means or not, your pocketbook should not be touched without your permission.

We Can Do Better.

Vote Harold Bayonne, #33 for Councilman-at-Large. I look forward to humbly and honorably serving this community.



“To those who have already placed their votes during the early voting period, or by mail - I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. Taking the time to vote your voice is the only way we see change in our day to day lives.”

WHAT IS THE COUNCILMAN-AT-LARGE?

A large percentage of citizens in our community do not know what a Councilman-at-Large is. They've never heard of the position, and they don't even know the name of the person who currently holds the position and acts on your behalf.
A Councilman-at-Large is...

- #1**
 - Citizen Spokesperson** for every single citizen
 - Liaison** between city & citizen
 - Has your back** votes your voice
 - Protects** your Wallet, your safety, your interests
 - Says NO** when it is NOT in the best interest of the Citizens
 - Says Yes** when it is in the best interest of the Citizens

You have the ability to vote for someone who holds every one of the qualities listed, me, **Harold Bayonne #33**, candidate for Councilman-at-Large. I will serve the citizens of this community courageously and boldly. I will be accessible. You will know my name, my face, my voice and my passion for this City. I will work tirelessly, dedicating myself to ensuring each of my fellow citizens is experiencing the quality of life they deserve.

HAROLD BAYONNE

COUNCILMAN-AT-LARGE

VOTE #33

FIRST, THINGS FIRST

Crime

Citizens are saying they don't feel safe.
We will crack down on crime.

Utility Rate Increase

As future Councilman-at-Large, I am already working towards your best interest; educating myself on how to create an ordinance that states that the Citizens of Natchitoches must be involved in the voting of an increase to their Utilities. **We must not permit taxation without representation.** Whether you have the means or not, your pocketbook should not be touched without your permission.



Election Day, Saturday, March 23

WE CAN DO BETTER



ENDORSED BY Dee A. Hawthorne
Former District Court Judge
Natchitoches, Louisiana

Paid for by Candidate.

To the Residents and Voters of Natchitoches

**By: Candidate for Councilman At Large
Betty Sawyer Smith**

I desire to continue providing effective leadership and service to Natchitoches Residents as Council at Large for the City of Natchitoches. As a public servant, Integrity and Honesty are of the utmost importance. Several opponents have not demonstrated those qualities and are being dishonest, deceptive and preying on the intelligence of residents and voters by being untruthful and falsely leading the public to believe that if elected they will rescind the utility rate increase which is totally untrue and an impossible promise, one that could undermine the safety, reliability and quality of our water, sewer and electric services. In order to ensure and provide a better quality of water, a larger volume production and meet the demands and needs of residents and new businesses brought into the city, upgrades to plant 3 are needed and the building of a new water treatment plant is essential for the growth of Natchitoches. In 2013 under the prior administration's leadership

the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) mandated that the current water treatment plant be upgraded. In 2015 under the same administration, a General Bond Ordinance was executed for the improvements and construction of a new water treatment plant, and which required that the city set or fix rates to pay for utilities projects. Now the water treatment system is in such bad condition that the State ordered that it be fixed immediately, or the City would face harsh consequences. The Utilities Revenue Refunding Bonds were designated and maintained in the reserve fund and used solely for the purpose of paying the principal and interest on the series of the bonds. However, instead of the former administration upgrading the water system, the money was rededicated towards the building of PARC Natchitoches. The building of PARC left the Reserves depleted and city residents are left to repay the defaulted bond. The PARC's baseball tournament on its own **DOES NOT** currently generate sufficient revenues to pay the bond obligation. The Council had no choice but to honor

the commitment made by the previous administration to City bondholders that new rates would be implemented to repay loans for water projects. The current administration has now paid 2.5 million towards the loan and is expected to pay the remaining 2.5 million before the end of 2025. The rate increase also provided much needed raises to firemen and police. There is one total rate increase proposal with a 2-year implementation plan not 2 different increases as Opponents are falsely telling residents, which went into effect May 1, 2023. Forty percent of households use less than 2,000 gallons of water per month. Water issues have been neglected for too long and Natchitoches still have the lowest rates in the state. The Council only did what was mandated by LDH and as a result the city will have cleaner water. The current administration has always

been transparent about city finances and matters concerning the city's well-being, giving residents a chance to voice their opinions and concerns through town hall meetings, or by web. If **YOU** truly want to see Natchitoches continue to thrive and grow, I urge you **NOT** to believe these false promises made by these opponents who are preying on the intelligence of voters. Join in and help continue the work and vision begun by the current administration. On March 23, please vote #36 Betty Sawyer Smith for Councilman at Large. I pledge to be your voice, represent you with integrity and fairness, answer your calls and be accessible to everyone. You can contact me at 318-332-8668 or 318-352-7168 or by email: msbssmith@yahoo.com

**TOGETHER WE CAN
MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Standing in Unity for Proven Leadership



Natchitoches Association of Ministers and other area Pastors support Betty Sawyer Smith for Councilperson At Large of Natchitoches. Standing from left to right: Altorio R. Holden, Jr., Pastor Altorio R. Holden, Sr., Evangelist Thelma Williams, Rev. Dr. Ail Harris, Jr., Council At Large Candidate Betty Sawyer Smith, Pastor Steven Harris, Sr., Rev. Dr. Elbert R. Demery, Pastor Dr. Linda King, Pastor Brian Small, Pastor LaRon Winslow, Minister Jacoby Bradley, and Pastor Conway Jones.



RE-ELECT
#36
BETTY
SAWYER SMITH
COUNCILMAN AT LARGE

EXPERIENCED * QUALIFIED * FAIR

Paid for by Councilman at Large Betty Sawyer Smith

February 29,2024

Ronnie Williams, Mayor
City of Natchitoches
P.O. Box 37
Natchitoches, Louisiana 71458

Dear Mayor,

As you know, I sent a letter dated November 21,2023 to you and all five (5) City Council members regarding your plans to build a fire station on University Parkway fronting Raggio Tires and closing the existing fire station on Martin Luther King Dr. This idea to build a fire station in the 1000-1100 block of University Parkway was, and still is a BAD idea.

In the letter, I asked to meet with each of you one, or two at a time to avoid a quorum. I did meet to discuss this issue with Councilman Eddie Harrington in his office prior to sending my letter to each of you. After sending the letter, I was ignored by both You, and the City Council, as I did not receive a single call from any one to discuss my concern. I am disappointed in both You, and the City Council for your apparent lack of concern in regards to a very serious issue that could very well, in the future, impact the lives of some of our city residents if this initiative is followed thru.

Breda Town, Bailey Heights and Jackson Square are the oldest neighborhoods in the city and

because of age, they bear a higher risk for fire due to aging building materials including old wiring. However, that is not to say that some homes have not been rehabilitated over the years but, the vast majority probably have not.

I can agree on closing Fire Station 3 on martin Luther King Jr. Drive, if,(1) a new fire station is constructed on the four lane section of University Parkway near I-49 and (2) if a new fire station is constructed on Texas Street on, or near the new Public Works Department on Texas Street to service Breda Town, Bailey Heights, Jackson Square, Nolley Point, Monroe Road, the Fox Run area and the north La Hwy 3175 By Pass.

We do not need another fire station in front of Northwestern State University, we already have Central Fire Station which is less than a mile from the front gate. Place two fire stations where they can better service the community.

I am still available to discuss this issue and I must say to those citizens that live in the areas I listed in paragraph 4, I would be upset for losing my fire station and will now suffer a longer response time. The response time from the new station will be longer to the majority of its response area.

I can be contacted at (318) 471-1604.

Sincerely,
Dennie C. Boyt, Fire Chief ret.
Candidate for Councilman at Large

March 11,2024

Dear Voters:

Election Day has arrived and this election, and YOUR vote, is very important. I trust that you will exercise your right to vote because YOUR vote COUNTS!! I have been campaigning door to door and I am doing my best to cover every neighborhood in the city and, I hope to see YOU.

I am "Chief" Dennie Boyt, Fire Chief retired, with Natchitoches Fire Department and a candidate for Councilman At Large, a very important office in the Mayor/Council form of government. The office being elected city wide is an important voice for YOU. There are issues that must be addressed and someone has to ask tough questions and make tough decisions.

I spent 2/3's of my life, a total of 40 years, serving YOU, the citizens of Natchitoches as a proud public servant as a Firefighter and for the last 10 years of my career as Fire Chief. I served you with loyalty, dedication, honor and integrity to protect the lives and property of ALL citizens and did my very best. I am also proud to be a veteran of the U.S. military.

Included in this ad is the second letter

that I sent to the Mayor on your behalf. I trust that you will read it before you vote. Many of you live in the 3 oldest neighborhoods in the City of Natchitoches; Breda Town, Bailey Heights and Jackson Square, whose homes, because of age, are at a higher risk if fire.

My first letter in December to the Mayor and City Council addressed the relocation of your nearest fire station to an area farther from your neighborhood, however, I gave the Mayor and the City Council a solution to locate a fire station closer to you than the proposed "new" fire station. In my letter I asked to meet with both the Mayor and City Council members but not one person contacted me after receiving my letter. My latest letter dated February 29,2024 was addressed to the Mayor only. I have yet to hear from him.

Please understand this is about your life safety and nothing else, this is bigger than politics. This fire station issue is a tiger and I'm not going to turn loose of its tail until we get this settled!!

Help ME, help YOU!!

Sincerely,
Dennie C. Boyt, Fire Chief ret.
Candidate for Councilman at Large

"Chief" **VOTE #34**
DENNIE BOYT
COUNCILMAN-AT-LARGE

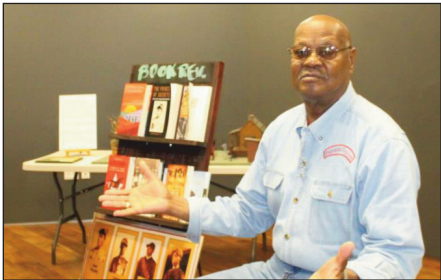
Veteran - Proven Experienced Leadership
Dedicated - Loyal Committed Public Servant



Master Folk Artist and Toy Maker Elvin L. Shields Speaks About Black History at the NPL

Elvin L. Shields is a twisted wire toy maker from Cane River plantations who started making toys at the age of five. He began volunteering for Cane River National Historical Park at

Oakland Plantation where he teaches others the art of toy making. Shields was inducted into the Louisiana Folklife Center Hall of Master Folk Artists in 2022.




To the Citizens of Natchitoches:

The campaign trail over the past two months has been educational and enjoyable. I have knocked on close to 2,000 doors - and am still knocking - and while it has been nice seeing so many friends, I especially have embraced meeting somebody new and gaining their confidence to the point that they consider voting for me.

A part of my door-to-door visits include listening to feedback about our city. I am keeping a summary of those observations and whether I am elected or not, will share that information with the mayor and city council members in hopes that it can help make our city better, be it something related to a specific district or a city-wide initiative.

Your vote on the Match 23 election day would be appreciated! It would be an honor to be Natchitoches' next Councilman-at-Large.

Greg Burke

 **GregBurke.net**

PAID FOR BY CANDIDATE

Vote for
GREG
BURKE
COUNCILMAN-AT-LARGE



All for One | One for All | ALL for Natchitoches.

You Are So Blessed

By: Sheila Pierre

I know that Mother's Day and Father's Day are months away, but Parents should be loved and celebrated daily. When deciding to write, I play around with topics. Ultimately, I ask God to direct and speak to me. The word "Parents" just kept coming into my spirit. Somebody always needs this reminder. If you can still see both parents or just one of them, know how truly BLESSED you are.

Be Thankful

I'm sure life hasn't been a bed of roses for any families. There have been and will always be tough times, but people find ways to get through those times. Always appreciate your parents for

everything they have done and for all of the sacrifices they have made along the way. Thank God for them, and never take them for granted. Daily, remember how blessed you are to have them here.

Quality Time

You have your own lives and families, and day-to-day life can be hectic. There is never enough time in the day to get everything done. But never be too busy to visit, sit down, and have talks and laughs with Mom and Dad. Call them often. They need quality time, and so do you. All of those moments shared together may someday become cherished memories. So many of us wish we had the opportunity to make more memories.



Be Respectful


No parent-child relationship is perfect. I've heard people say how their parents get on their nerves. From time to time, parents may say and do things that cause some frustration. It happens in every household. Do like I used to do when my mom said something I didn't like: be quiet and walk away. No matter how old you are, your words, tone, and actions shouldn't be disrespectful. Remember who they are and all they have done for you. Let me leave you with a very familiar scripture. Ephesians 6:1-8 KJV "Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee,

and thou mayest live long on earth." My mom and grandmother used to say, "When you are disrespectful and sassy, you shorten your days."

No Love or Loss Like Losing Great Parents

Sadly, sometimes, our parents leave this world before we do. After they are gone, this world can be a lonely place. People will say they will be there for us and may mean it, but nobody will listen, understand, give advice, and fill those voids like Mom and Dad. Mothers and fathers are truly a blessing. Losing those we love hurts, but there is no love or loss like that of a great mom and dad. The pain never ends. I read a quote that said, "Sometimes the memories just fall from my eyes."

LET'S STAY TOGETHER!



VOTE #27

RE-ELECT
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
RONNIE WILLIAMS, JR.
MAYOR OF NATCHITOCHES

CONTINUING THE WORK,
FULFILLING THE PROMISE!

Learn more: <https://www.mayorronniewilliamsjr.com/>

PAID FOR BY CANDIDATE

RE-ELECT
RONNIE WILLIAMS JR
FOR NATCHITOCHES MAYOR

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!
VOTE!

March 23, 2024

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
Learn more: <https://www.mayorronniewilliamsjr.com/>

Can We Work Together?

by Herbert de Launay

Can we work together? Can we listen to others? Are we respectful of others? This is the challenge for the world today.

Fortunately, many can work together and listen to one another. They are the ones who keep things running in our families and communities.

Unfortunately, those who disagree are making the most noise. Sometimes, we see this in public meetings, in Congress, or on social media. It seems that the disagreements capture the headlines.

Consider words like negotiate and compromise. These can be honorable words. People and situations are different. Faced with differences, we can listen to each other's needs and try to find ways to work together.

When I was a child, we had a black-and-white TV at home. We just had one TV. Also, there was just one phone in the house. It was in the kitchen, and a cord hooked it to the wall. We had to take turns. Mom and Dad could not provide separate menus for each child. We had to get along. Of course, for special occasions, we could ask grandma to fix our favorite cake for our birthdays.

I am disappointed that some Louisiana politicians want to return to a closed primary system where Democrats vote for Democrats and Republicans vote for Republicans. In an open primary system, anyone can vote for anyone. This means that candidates for public office have to be able to talk to and appeal to everyone. Open primaries sometimes help to support more moderate candidates, while closed primaries



sometimes result in more partisan candidates.

Pope Francis has often spoken about synodality in the last few years. Synod is a Greek word meaning an assembly to decide an issue or course of action. Synodality is a process of brothers and sisters collaborating and discerning together. Of course, if one person or group feels they know it all or have all the answers, they will want to avoid discussing things.

Sometimes, different people and groups have viewpoints, needs, and talents. If we work together and learn from one another, we can have a richer experience for everyone.

I remember an old nursery rhyme from childhood:

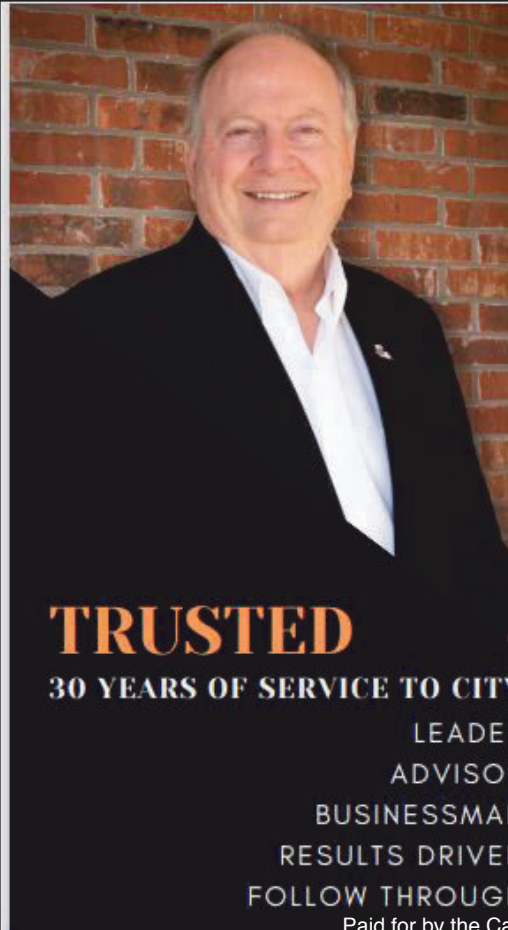
"Jack Sprat could eat no fat
His wife could eat no lean.
And so, between them both, you see
They licked the platter clean."

Our differences can be okay. We do not have to compete with others.

St. Paul uses the human body image in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Our differences are part of God's plan. In 1 Corinthians 12:26, Paul says, "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul explains the need for patience and kindness in our relations and dealings with others. He tells us not to be rude, selfish, or quick-tempered. Some of the talk in political speeches or on social media seems rude and not respectful. In Matthew 5:22, Jesus says we should not call our brother a fool. Some of our language in discussing others in political discussions or in social media postings does not measure up to the standards of Jesus and Paul.





ELECTION DATE
March 23

Your Vote **Will**
Make a Difference

Vote
Lee
Posey

FOR MAYOR OF NATCHITOCHES

#26

TRUSTED
30 YEARS OF SERVICE TO CITY

LEADER
ADVISOR
BUSINESSMAN
RESULTS DRIVEN
FOLLOW THROUGH

▶ **Experience
& Integrity
Matter**

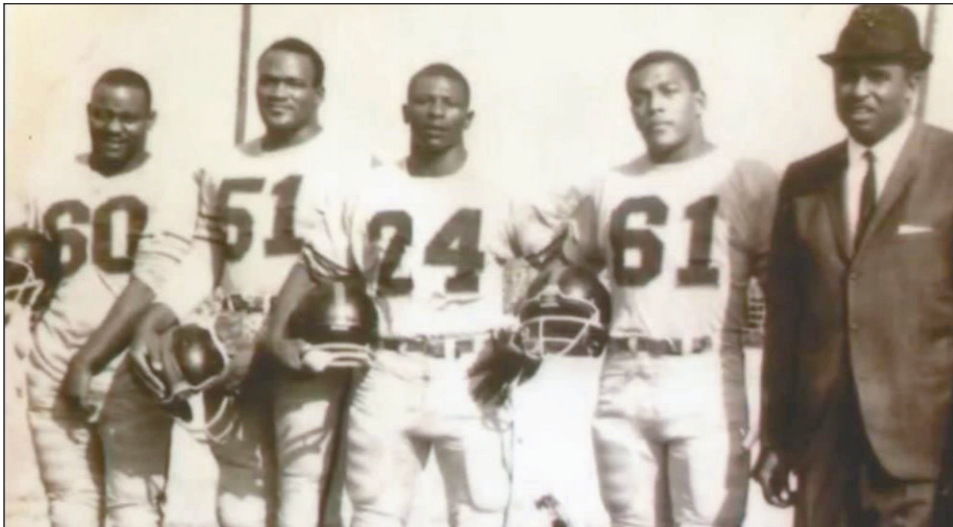
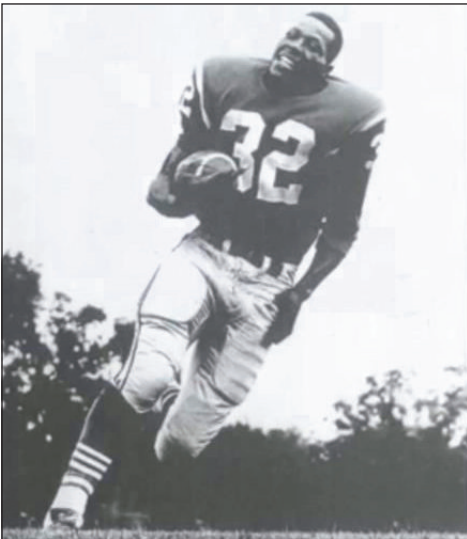
Paid for by the Candidate.

Tribute to Sports Legend Coach J.D. Garrett

John D. Garrett, affectionately known as Coach J.D. Garrett, was a football, basketball, and track star at Natchitoches Central High School. He was a standout running back at Grambling and played five seasons for the Boston Patriots of the American Football League from 1964 to 1967.

Garrett spent decades coaching football and track at his alma mater, Natchitoches Central High School. He also worked at the city pools for nearly 60 years and taught thousands of chil-

dren how to swim. In 2015, he was inducted into the Grambling Legends Sports Hall of Fame.



Re-Elect Christopher Petite

Councilman District 3

"Moving Forward"

★★★★★
VOTE
45

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Results Driven

A color portrait of Christopher Petite, a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a grey suit, white shirt, and a blue and white striped tie, smiling.

Paid for by the Candidate.

Shiloh Baptist Church Pastoral Installation of Pastor Carlos Donaway



Shiloh Baptist Church Pastoral Installation of Pastor Carlos Donaway



SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY **WORSHIP** *Service*

With **PASTOR Carlos Donaway**

1st, 3rd & 4th

SUNDAY 11AM

MOTTO
TEACHING JESUS AND LOVING PEOPLE...

410 SIXTH ST. - NATCHITOCHE, LA 71457

Louisiana Criminal Justice Reform 2024

By: Marvin Blake Jr.

The **8th Amendment** to the Constitution, along with the rest of the Bill of Rights, was ratified on December 15, 1791. It has served as a limitation upon the state or federal government's ability to impose **cruel and unusual punishment** on criminal defendants before and after a conviction.

In June 2017, former Democratic Governor John Bel Edwards signed a comprehensive criminal justice reform package comprising six Republicans, two Democrats, and one independent. The reform package came about because Louisiana has one of the highest incarceration rates in the country. After the new law was enacted, it was estimated that it would save the state \$270 million per year.

Seven years later, with a new Republican Governor and a Supermajority Republican House and Senate, in a special session of the legislature held in February of this year, Criminal Justice Reform 2024 became law, emphasizing not saving state funds but making laws dealing with criminal justice tougher.

One law designed to protect police officers in Louisiana dealt with **Qualified Immunity**. Under the new qualified immunity law, lawsuits can only be filed against a police officer, which

has established prior to the suit that an individual's statutory or constitutional right has been violated. If not, there can be no lawsuit against a police officer. Also passed in the special session was a law that toughens sentencing guidelines for the **crime of carjacking**. The new law will mandate that anyone found guilty of **carjacking** in Louisiana will now be sentenced to **twenty years in prison**, up from a previous **sentence of five years**. Also passed in the session was a bill that lowered the age to 17 for violent offenders to be tried as an adult.

The most serious of criminal justice reform laws passed dealt with the **method(s)** that will now be used in the **Execution** of individuals sentenced to **Death** in Louisiana. With the new law, those on death row will now be put to death using **nitrogen gas and or the electric chair**. In addition to the new execution law, individuals found guilty of a serious crime after August 1, 2023, in Louisiana will now have to serve a **mandatory 85%** of their sentence before being eligible for parole. In prior years, the time served to be eligible for parole or early release was between **25% to 40%**.

After reading and analyzing some of the new laws passed, I understand the reasoning behind increasing the sentences



of those who commit the crime of **carjacking**. I am unsure about trying 17-year-olds as an adult in a court of law. In addition, due to the seriousness of some crimes, it is tough to envision, but understandably, 17-year-olds can now be **tried as adults** in a court of law. In addition, having been around police officers most of my young life and having many policemen whom I consider friends, I believe that **qualified immunity** for law enforcement officers is the right thing to do.

To close, this new law that mandates that prisoners serve at least **85%** of their sentence, for lack of better words, is just **mean-spirited**. Maybe for some who may need a longer sentence, but for **all**? And being neither a **critic** nor **proponent** of the death penalty, I have not found any justifiable or reasonable explanation for the use of **nitrogen gas and or the electric chair** to execute convicted murderers in Louisiana.

That's My View!



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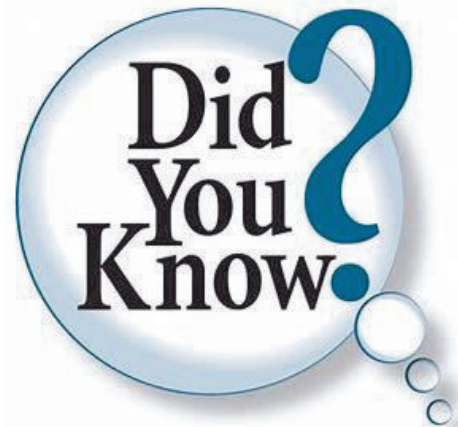
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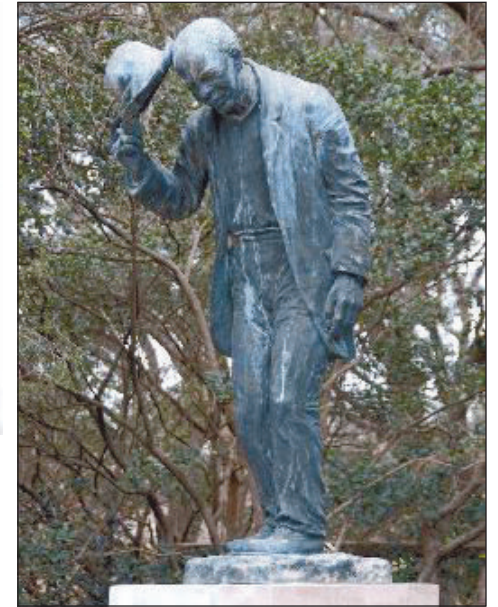
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DID YOU KNOW?

Natchitoches was established in 1714 by Canadien explorer Louis Juchereau de St. Denis. It is the oldest permanent European settlement within the borders of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. 306 years later, the first African American Mayor Ronnie Williams Jr. was elected to office.



Uncle Jack "The Good Darky" statue was displayed for 41 years at the corner of Washington and Lafayette Streets in Natchitoches. The plaque at the bottom of the statue read, "Erected by the City of Natchitoches in grateful recognition of the arduous and faithful service of the good darkies of Louisiana." The African American community did not generally like the statue as it provided a subservient and inferior view of the race. In 1997, Mayo Angelo criticized the statue, writing: "Uncle Jack is the quintessential obsequious Negro servant ... The droop of his shoulders bears witness not only to his years but more



specifically to his own understanding of his place as a poor black in a rich white world." During the civil rights era, the statue was protested, and in 1968, the city of Natchitoches peacefully removed it. The Good Darky statue is now housed in the back of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana Rural Life Museum.

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For the Natchitoches Parish Detention Center, dial **357-9300**

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Rodrick Hamilton Jr. Receives Hero Award

Rodrick Hamilton Jr. received an award for saving his grandfather's life who was suffering from a seizure. Fire Chief Wynn, Mayor Williams, and AC Walker presented this award at Weaver Elementary School.



Take your Burdens to the Lord, & Leave Them There

By: Minister/Author,
Bonita G. Moses Arnold



It's easier to say that you have taken your burdens to the Lord when you have already come out of a situation. But can you say it when you're still going through it? Taking your burdens to the Lord and leaving them there is not so much an affirmation, but it's an act of faith that needs to be followed through with actions. Taking your burdens to the Lord requires patience, perseverance, and prayer. The Apostle

Paul reminds us in Hebrews. 11:6: "But without faith, it's impossible to please him. For he who comes to God must believe that he is a rewarder to those that diligently seek him." When we bless others, how often do we return to get it? When we surrender our burdens unto the Lord, we are not to return and get our burdens. We must trust him and believe that he will work it out. In the meantime, we are to continue to praise and give thanks to his holy name because he is worthy of all the praises.

Pilgrim's Pride Recognizes Natchez Native "Desne Bullock" for Six Months of Perfect Attendance



Photo Credit: Pilgrim's Pride Natchitoches

Spotlight on Natchitoches Central High School Senior “Logan Smith”

Parents: Christopher Smith Sr. and Shaquita Payton

1. Do you have a coach or athlete that you look up to as a role model, and why?

My coach, Sepulvado, taught me no matter how hard something is, you always have to find a way to push through it. Just like in practice every day, yea, we get tired, and he knows that, but it was about who was going to be the toughest and keep going.

2. What do you believe is the greatest challenge most athletes are facing today?

The greatest challenge athletes face today is working to become better at the sport they want to be good at. Even though it's hard—

and I've been in that position—you have to do it to become better.

3. Which strengths do you believe you have that makes you a great athlete?

Strength, along with shooting the ball very well and playing hard, makes me a great athlete.

4. What do you see yourself accomplishing in five to ten years?

In 5-10 years, I see myself playing for a college under an academic scholarship and hopefully graduating from there; that's my dream. I haven't decided what I would like to major in yet.

5. Describe the qualities you believe an effective coach must have.

Qualities an effective coach must have are:

- Knowledge about the game
- Support of the players he's teaching.
- Respect and patience with his players.

6. Any encouragement or advice for younger kids who would like to play sports?

My advice for younger kids is to never give up or stop working hard at something you really want to do and what you love because if you do, you will regret it.





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Natchitoches Central High School Announces All District Awards

Boys Basketball:
Logan Smith (1st Team)
JaDell Demery (2nd Team)
Jaden Braden (Honorable Mention)

Girls Basketball:
Tootie Gallien (1st Team)
Alyssa Christophe (1st Team)
Morgan Lacour (Honorable Mention)
Akeelah Wade (Honorable Mention)



Photo Credits: Natchitoches Central Athletics



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OTHER RESTRICTIONS MAY APPLY.

Lakeview High School Announces District Standings

Lakeview Lady Gators District 3-2A All District Awards

Timberlyn Washington, 3 Time!! District 3-2A Most Valuable Player (MVP)
Najahe Davis, First Team All-District
Alonna Henderson, Second Team All-District
Timberlyn Washington, All-Defensive Team
Ja’Niyah Armstrong, All-Defensive Team
Amiya Marshall, All- District Honorable Mention
3 Times Coach of the Year- Coach DeWaskie Fuller

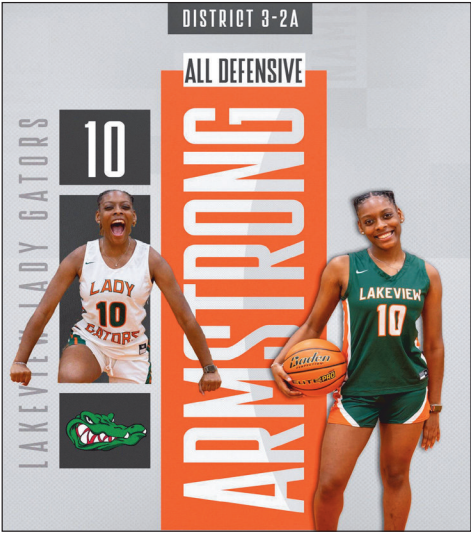


Photo Credits: Lakeview Lady Gators

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Spotlight on Lakeview High School Senior “Dereon J. Calvin”

Parents: Timothy & Shalonda Young

1. Do you have a coach or athlete that you look up to as a role model, and why?

I look up to my dad, Coach Tim Young, and Coach Slidell. They push me so hard and play a big part in who I am today. And, of course, LeBron, one of the best players in the world.

2. What do you believe is the greatest challenge most athletes are facing today?

The two greatest challenges athletes face are the streets and having the confidence to truly go after their dreams.

3. Which strengths do you believe you have that makes

you a great athlete?
I am humble and teachable.

4. What do you see yourself accomplishing in five to ten years?
Hopefully achieving my college degree and going to the NBA.

5. Describe the qualities you believe an effective coach must have.
Patience and respect. Respect is earned on both sides.

6. Any encouragement or advice for younger kids who would like to play sports?
Pray, keep God first, stay humble and coachable. It's always more to learn.





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Scenes from The Village of Natchez Groundbreaking Ceremony

Building of the Temporary City Hall



Photo Credits: Kevin Walker



The Village of Natchez Honors Native Howard Conday Esq for His Continued Support



Photo Credit: Alexa Bernard-Conday



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City of Natchitoches Announces Kickoff Meetings for Grant Projects

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Natchitoches Mayor Ronnie Williams, Jr., announces that “kickoff” meetings were held today for two major grant projects for which the city was awarded a total of over \$20 million in Federal funding.

Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development District 08 and Headquarters officials were in Natchitoches today for a scoping meeting for the Natchitoches Safe Streets Revitalization project, for which the city was awarded \$17.2 million in Federal Rebuilding American Infrastructure Through Sustainability and Equity [RAISE] grant funding. Although this project targets improvements along the Texas Street corridor and adjacent streets in West Natchitoches, the grant also impacts virtually all other parts of the city, including Keyser Avenue, University Parkway, and the campus of Northwestern State University, through implementation of safety improvements identified in the Natchitoches Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan that was developed back in 2017. Today’s

meeting, along with execution of the Project Agreement between DOTD and the City last week, marks the official beginning of the design consultant procurement process that will lead to the development of construction plans, thus making this vital project one step closer to becoming a reality.

The RAISE grant meeting followed a virtual “kickoff” meeting between City officials and staff of the Louisiana Office of Community Development to initiate the study phase of the Louisiana Watershed Initiative Round 2 project for South Natchitoches Drainage Improvements, for which the City was recently awarded \$3.16 million in Federal grant funds. This project will address flooding and drainage issues along Fairgrounds Road and Industrial Drive, as well as in Pan Am and Town South subdivisions.

“I’m proud of these and many other grant program wins we’ve been a part of over the past three-plus years that will improve the quality of life for our citizens,” stated Mayor Williams, who added, “And we continue to



apply for other grants and to take advantage of other funding opportunities as they arise.” These include the Safe Streets for All [SS4A] implementation grant program, for which funding is being sought for constructing needed roadway safety improvements identified in the recently-completed SS4A Action Plan, for which the City previously received \$280,000 in

Federal funds; as well as the Federal “earmark” program, for which funding is being sought for implementation of the first phase of the Campus Edge District improvements identified as part of the Natchitoches Next Master Plan.

For more information about these projects and other grant awards to the City, please contact the Office of the Mayor at (318) 352-2772.

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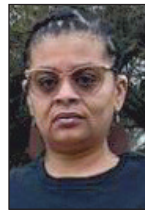
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Unity in the Black Community

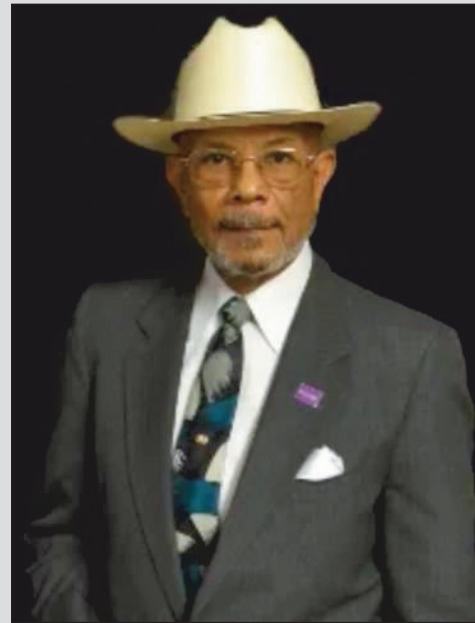
By: Nikki Madison



As I begin to speak about unity in our community, we suffer from criticism from our own culture more than others. We will sell each other out to gain favor or power without realizing or caring about what it does to our community and how it contributes to the division we see today. We can be envious of others when, in fact, we should be acknowledging someone's success as a significant milestone in their lives. Uplifting and uniting one another is the key to success in our commu-

nity. We have to lead by example for the younger generation to follow. One of the things that we practice today is learned behavior. And yes, old habits are hard to break. But we can make a difference. Regardless of race or background, we must understand and appreciate diversity and its impact on the community. It's not about who's right or wrong. It is simply about finding new meaning in the community and becoming a United force. Diversity is strength. The community needs purpose; with that purpose, you will begin to see unity.

Quotes by Randy Stelly



"Scientist says that the sun is going to burn out in 4 to 5 billion years. That means that the roads in Natchitoches Parish will get fixed in the dark."

Voters and Civic League Meeting

Thursday, March 28

Location: Winnfield Funeral Home
318 North Street
6:00 pm

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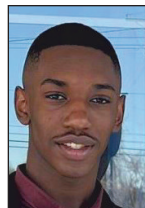


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What does it mean to trust God?

By: Minister Tristen Jefferson



Trusting God Definition: Trusting God is an essential element of true and saving faith that looks to God and finds peace, strength, contentment, and much more in him, and all that he has done, is doing, and will do, both now and forever in his Son Jesus Christ. Trusting God is one of those truths we think we understand until we are called upon to do it, and then we discover that there is more to it than we realized. Trusting God is an aspect of saving faith which has been said to have three elements to it: knowledge, assent, and trust (cf. John Gill, Body of Divinity, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978], 411). All three aspects go together, but without trust, faith is inadequate and shockingly indistinguishable from the faith of demons who believe and shudder before God, yet do not repent and surrender themselves to him (Jas. 2:19 cf. Ps.

78:22). Trusting God is essential to Christian life. This, however, does not mean it is easy to trust God, especially in a world that questions the sanity of trusting him at almost every turn. Nevertheless, trust God we must, and the Bible has much to say that will help us no matter what our circumstances. We Are Commanded to Trust God The first thing to understand is that we are commanded to trust the Lord. In Psalm 4:5 David tells the reader to “offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.” Proverbs 3:5-6 exhorts us to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.” In fact, the Christian life is one of trust in God from the beginning to the end. In its inception we repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15) and then all the way through we are called upon to believe God, and to believe in the Lord Jesus

who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:1, 6). As the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, “without faith it is impossible to please God,

for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (11:6).

DEADLINE FOR THE BURT CLARK FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP ENDS ON MARCH 29, 2024



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- ACT/SAT score report
- Acceptance letter to an accredited college or university
- Acceptance letter to Southern University and A&M College
- Two recommendation letters



SCAN TO APPLY!

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MARCH 29TH 2024 6:00 PM

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Maintaining Your Gift

The Gift of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh

By: Prophetess Christine Pier

Anytime you maintain something, you want to continue to have it, keep it in existence, or not allow it to become less valuable. Queen Esther knew how to maintain her gifts in the book of Esther. Her life and her family's life were on the line. When the enemy came, it found no expression in her life. Queen Esther understood who she was. Not only that, but a few of Esters' gifts were leadership, wisdom, and prayer. Ester was very wise in deploying her gifts. She confidently presented her gifts to the king because she knew who she was.

Living in a world full of obstacles could be challenging. Whether you are part of fivefold ministries or have a gift to share with the world, you can maintain your gift. The book of I Peter 4:10 says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace". That tells us that our gifts are not to be used for ourselves. Our gifts can save others' lives. So, we have to nurture and protect it at all costs.

God took me back to the three wise men in Matthew 2:1-12 when I thought about gifts. These men were very wise for several reasons. They understood that you cannot just bring any gift before the Lord. Your gift must be pure and represent who Jesus is.

In order to maintain your gifts, you must understand three things. These gifts represent who He is and who you are. Jesus came as King of Israel (messiah), Priest of God (to atone for man's sins), and prophet of God (speaking God's words). The wise men's gifts represented each office in prophetic typology and pointed to all Jesus would do in His incarnation and glorification. Your gift must glorify God and dignify who He is.

Gift one: The wise men brought gold. Gold is symbolic of Christ's deity as a king. The gift of gold, given by one of the wise men, pointed to the begotten Son, who God gave to be the King of His people. One way to maintain your gift of gold is to understand who you are. Revelation 1:6 KJV: And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. We are kings and priests and cannot allow ourselves to become less than that. God has delegated some of His royal authority to us, giving humankind rule and dominion over His creation. We must rule and rule well; the Bible is



always the blueprint to guide us through.

Gift two: The wise men brought the second gift to Jesus, Frankincense, the high priest of God. Frankincense is an aromatic, clear resin from trees in northern India and Arabia. Frankincense is also a symbol of prayer. (Psalm 141:2, Luke 1:10, Revelation 5:8). It was used in the Bible to anoint prophets for their divinely appointed work of revealing God communicating His will and words to His people. Importantly, you must spend time with the Father to maintain your gift. Prayer keeps the oil burning upon you, protects you from evil, and keeps the boiler room hot!! I don't know about you, but when the enemy comes, I need to be full of the fire.

Gift three: Last but not least, the wise men brought Myrrh as a gift. Myrrh means prophet of God, and this gift is very important for the prophets. Myrrh is a spice with a sweet smell that was used for medicine, cosmetics, and anointing oil. It was mixed with the oil used to anoint prophets. This oil distinguishes you from everybody else. Your gift must send off a scent that draws others.

In 1 Samuel 16:13, out of all David's brothers, God chose him. It doesn't matter who is in line first. The oil in this season will cause people on high to look for you and call your name out. To maintain your gift, you must have the oil upon you. In the book of 1 Samuel 17:33, when the youngest Son came before Samuel, the prophet commissioned him by anointing him as the future king. That tells us that for everything David did, God had him. David was called by God and had the gifts upon him. When God calls you, no one can stop it!!

Your gift must have that sweet smell. Your words must represent who God is. This type of anointing from God will stabilize, strengthen, protect, defend, provide faithful-

ness, give mercy, exalt you, and cause you to be used to influence nations, just like Jeremiah, whom God called a prophet to the nation as a child. The gifts were already inside of him. All Jeremiah had to do was maintain them. His obedience caused him to reign for forty years. Remember, like the three wise men, the number one key is to be wise.

If you read this article, say out loud, "I will maintain and continue to nourish my gifts, and I will not allow them to become less! Amen!"

Don't forget to check out my book on amazon called, "Dismantling Jezebel and All Her Tactics."

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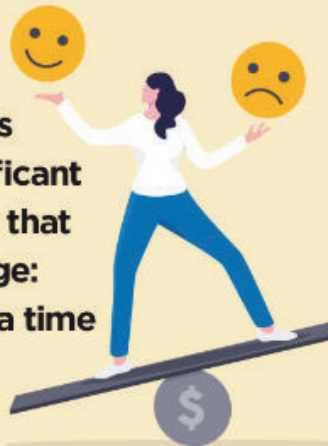
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IS MONEY MAKING YOU S-T-R-E-S-S-E-D?

More than 65 percent of respondents in a recent poll said money is a significant source of stress for them. If you're in that group, here are some ways to manage:

1. Take financial decisions one at a time
2. Prioritize essential bills
3. Track spending with a budget
4. Keep saving each month
5. Reach out for support



TAKE TIME TO INVEST IN YOURSELF

As the old saying goes - investing in yourself pays the best dividends. Here are some ways:

1. Develop a Hobby - Hobbies can complement your education and increase networking opportunities.
2. Read More - Reading for pleasure is a natural way to reduce stress.
3. Volunteer - Lending your talents and expertise to a volunteer opportunity is a great way to network.
4. Try a Solo Sport - Self-confidence and discipline are benefits of individual sports like swimming, biking, hiking, martial arts, archery, or dancing.



Redesign of Ben Johnson Baseball Park

Planning Session with the kids of The Boys and Girls Club



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NSU Foundation Announces Record Fund Raising and Endowment Performance Success

NATCHITOCHES – The Northwestern State University Foundation secured over \$7 million in private contributions in 2023, exceeding the previous year total by over \$2 million and marking the third straight year that the Foundation has recorded increases in contributions year over year.

The Foundation also announced record endowment returns and growth in 2023, outperforming peer educational institutions and exceeding state and national averages. A recent analysis conducted by Clearview Fiduciary Alliance ranked the NSU Foundation in the first quartile compared to peer institutions across the country with a return of 16 percent. This boost in performance and increases in endowment contributions led to overall growth of the portfolio. While other institutions in Louisiana grew an average of 2.5 percent last year, the NSU Foundation endowment grew 8.4 percent, exceeding the national average of 7.7 percent, according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers. Its study examined 688 endowments with combined assets of \$839 billion.

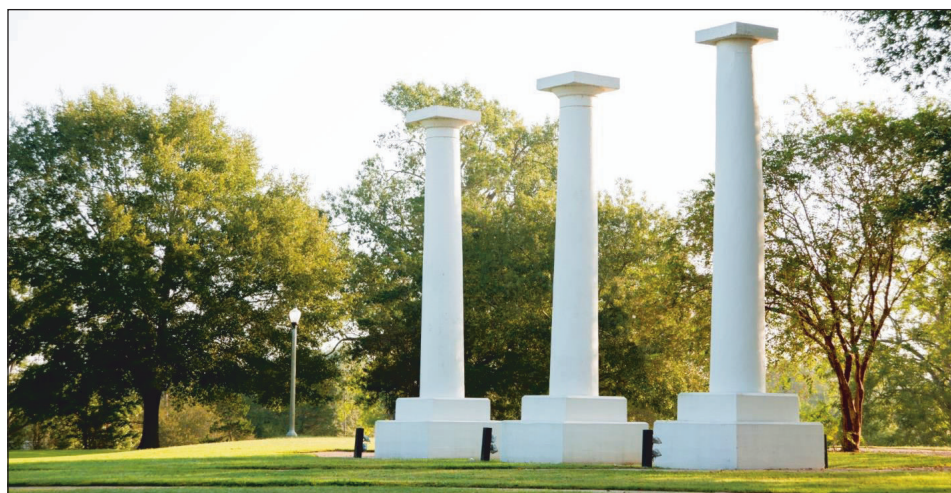
NSU Foundation Executive Director

Drake Owens attributed fundraising and endowment performance success to key support from donors, staff and volunteers as well as the Foundation's proactive approach in developing partnerships with business, industry and organizations that promote education and economic development.

"Contributions from major donors and strategic positioning by the NSU Office of Development and members of the NSU Foundation Fundraising and Finance/Investment committees resulted in a record year for private support and endowment performance," Owens said.

NSU President Marcus Jones expressed his gratitude stating, "The display of support by our donors shows that NSU is an institution worthy of investment. The Office of Development works tirelessly to garner support and their dedication to securing private funds is evident and greatly appreciated."

"Our donors are committed to investing in the future of NSU and have showed tremendous generosity and support," said NSU Director of the Office of Development Jill Bankston. "We have a great team and their passion for NSU and desire to succeed continues



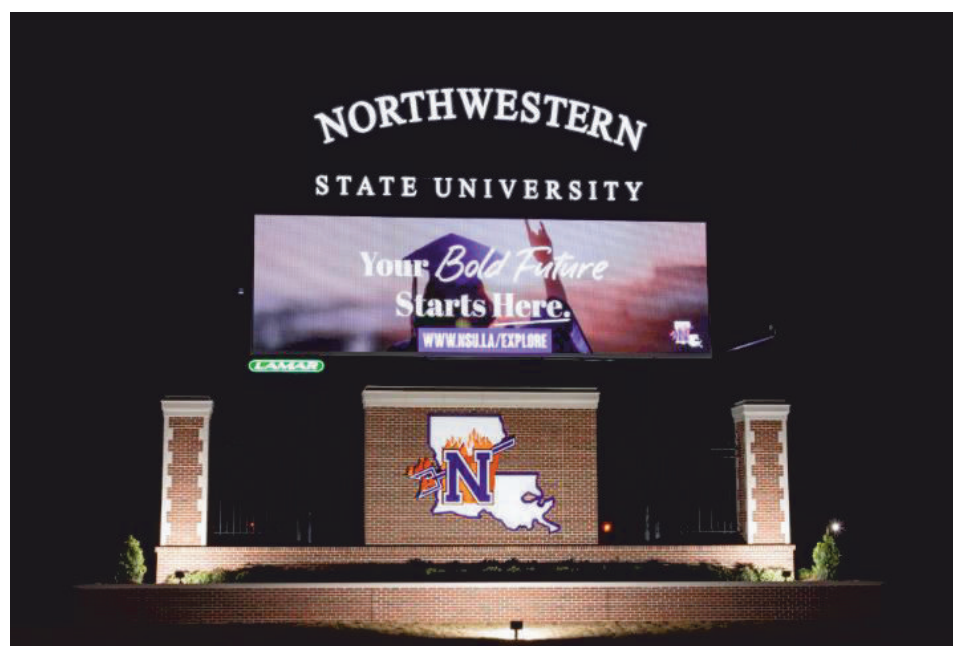
to pay dividends for our institution."

The ripple effect of the Foundation's success extends throughout the university's service region. A 2022 economic impact study reported that NSU contributed nearly \$520 million to the economy of north-west and central Louisiana and supported

the creation of 7,200 jobs in the region.

"The outlook for fundraising and endowment performance success is positive as 2024 trends indicate the NSU Foundation is on track for another record year for fundraising and endowment growth," Owens said.

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Letter to the Editor

By: Dorothy Shumpert

“A little humor for the people” Even though its humorous it’s the truth. My name is Dorothy Lawrence Shumpert, born April 2,1938 in Powhatan. My birth certificate says I’m “colored.” During the flood of 45 we moved to Natchitoches. My mother died when I was 3 so I was raised by my father and his mother. My first six years of schooling was at St. Anthony. Seventh grade was (N.P.T.S) Natchitoches Parish Training School. Twelfth grade was a “negro” approved high school. During the sixties came James Brown “Say it loud I’m “black” and proud.” I especially liked his song “I don’t want no body to give me nothing, open up the door and I’ll get it myself.” He did rather well with a six-grade education. “Still race chang-

ing I became “African American”. A friend of mine did ancestry and found I was “Indian Heritage” from my mother’s side. My father worked by the chamber of commerce planting flowers and cutting grass during the time that horrible darky statue was there. This is what a white man my father worked for gave him this plaque. Sam Lawrence, a man’s right hand, always there when needed. Polite, honest, hardworking and a friend. D.H. Whittington 1965. He passed in 84. I still have the plaque. My life hasn’t changed much at 85. I have always served one God, one Faith, Baptist, and one Baptism. I was led into Cane River by deacon Flanagan and Rev Carter emerged full body into the water at the age of 13. Let the people say “Amen”!

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