

St. John
The Baptist Parish
**Progress
Report**





Dear St. John the Baptist Parish Resident,

It is my pleasure to present the parish's 2012 Progress Report which highlights a number of major accomplishments and some of the activities conducted by parish government over the last twelve months. It is very difficult to detail everything completed, but I hope this report provides a good indication of our efforts and the current state of the parish. I will also touch on some of the challenges facing our parish and plans to address them in 2013.

Much has been accomplished toward improving governmental services, promoting economic development and supporting measures to enhance the quality of life for citizens while maintaining governmental transparency. A few of our efforts are highlighted in this report, with full understanding that government is continuous and major initiatives may span several years.

Despite the uncertain national economic picture, St. John continues to be a very desirable place to live and do business. Since 2012, \$41.7 million has been invested in residential and commercial construction, with a focus on job creation that complements existing endeavors.

Citizens recently approved five millage propositions that support increased levels of service while maintaining fiscal responsibility. These approvals ensure that the Council on Aging, St. John ARC, recreation department, animal shelter and road lighting efforts will benefit from a stable revenue source. Improvements to our drainage and water systems continue as we explore long-term, permanent solutions that ensure the continued delivery of safe, clean water. Mandatory, yearly ethics training is now in effect for all parish employees and financial disclosure is required for all administrators.

Our finance department has again earned national recognition for its efficient management of taxpayer dollars. Bonds have been refinanced, saving the parish substantial interest payments, and numerous grants have been secured to fund infrastructure improvements. Our Brown Bag Lunches, Town Hall meetings and attendance at neighborhood and civic meetings keep citizens informed of parish endeavors.

In light of the recent tragic events affecting our sheriff's office and the entire parish, those of us who work in government are reminded that serving the public is a calling, a privilege and an honor. As public servants, we will continue to work hard to earn, keep and honor the trust you have placed in us as we continue our service.

On behalf of my administration, the Parish Council and employees of St. John the Baptist Parish, I present this progress report and look forward to working with you as our community continues to recover from Hurricane Isaac.

Very truly yours,

Natalie Robottom

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President, St. John the Baptist Parish

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Parks & Recreation

Through public input and with the results of an extensive study currently under way, plans will be formulated to improve and more fully utilize all parks and recreational facilities. Recent voter approval of a millage rededication provides the recreation department with revenue to maintain facilities and expand services.

New REGALA Gym

The \$2.4 million, 15,000 square foot REGALA gymnasium is open for business and business is good! Having already hosted many athletic events, its close proximity to the Council on Aging building allows those residents to use it as well. The multi-use facility has offices for the recreation department and an available floor covering for the basketball court when used for civic and social events.



West Bank Park Enhancements

The construction of an 'airnasium,' or outdoor gymnasium as well as new restrooms and storage space is complete at the West Bank Recreational Complex. The park features lighted sports fields, a paved walking path and parking lot and plenty of space for future growth.



Peavine Boat Launch Improved

More access to beautiful Lake Pontchartrain is now available as enhancements have been made to the Peavine Boat Launch, including dredging the area to increase the depth. Boardwalks and docking areas were repaired, making launching and loading easier on boaters, paddlers and sailors.



Maurepas Wildlife Management Area Expands

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Coastal Protection Authority have added almost 30,000 acres to the Maurepas Swamp Wildlife Management Area, bringing the total area to some 103,000 acres. Stretching across Livingston, Ascension, St. James and St. John the Baptist Parishes, the WMA provides storm surge protection as well as extensive recreational opportunities.

Levee Trail Lengthens

Starting in Audubon Park in New Orleans, the East Bank bike trail atop the levee now stretches across Orleans, Jefferson and St. Charles Parishes and into St. John. Currently the trail extends to East 29th Street in Reserve with the next phase of construction taking it to West 10th Street. The trail will eventually cross the entire parish.



Human Resources

Parish employees are enhancing their skills through continuing education and training to better serve our residents. More than 100 employees have completed 565 training and professional development courses with many achieving advanced certification in their respective fields.

Ethics Program

A new state mandate requires government employees to complete annual ethics training, educating workers on avoiding conflicts of interest. "All Staff" meetings continue to improve communications between employees across departments and provide a forum for employee training. For information about a career with St. John the Baptist Parish, visit sjbparish.com.



Finance Department Honored, Makes History

For the 9th consecutive year, St. John's finance department received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association.

Of 87,000 governments in the United States and Canada, less than 4% earn this award and to do it for nearly a decade is an extremely impressive accomplishment. Parish government will continue to strive to be a good steward of the public's money while increasing transparency in financial dealings.

Additionally, for the first time in history, the department received an unqualified opinion, with no deficiencies in internal control and no instances of noncompliance. According to the independent auditor, this is the first time the parish has received a perfect audit.

Bond Refinancing Savings

Historically low interest rates have allowed the parish to refinance, for the fourth time in recent years, approximately \$11.2 million in general obligation bonds, saving \$704,000 in interest payments. Water revenue bonds have also been refinanced with \$842,000 in savings. Similar to refinancing a mortgage, acquiring new bonds at lower interest rates saves taxpayers money.

Purchasing and Procurement

Efforts to reduce paper documents in the department continue as vendors and suppliers electronically submit invoices and opt to be paid online. Computer software, including Laserfiche and Workflow, are helping to better manage documents, streamline operations and increase efficiency.

Emergency Preparedness/Public Safety

Fire Department Upgrades

The Garyville Volunteer Fire Department's Mount Airy station has expanded, giving the department additional room to store emergency response gear. Having the necessary equipment on hand further shortens response times.



In Reserve, electronic upgrades provide high tech firefighting. The RVFD "first out" truck is equipped with monitors that allow a firefighter to remotely direct water to the top of a structure. Another one helps locate the best spot to send water in fires nearer the ground. The department has also purchased an iPad to make electronic records of incidents. An electronic program that opens hydrants remotely is also in use.



Louisiana's Firefighter of the Year

St. John firefighter Blake Estevez was honored for saving a young girl's life during a house fire in LaPlace. Estevez received a Certificate of Commendation from local American Legion Post 383 and the Firefighter of the Year Award from the American Legion, Department of Louisiana.

Waterford 3 Drill

The Department of Emergency Preparedness participated in a drill to simulate events in case of an emergency at Entergy's Waterford 3 station. Representatives of FEMA, the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and DEQ evaluated the department's performance as meeting all criteria evaluated during the drill, with no deficiencies or areas requiring corrective action.



Ferry Open

Ferry service between Edgard and Reserve was saved for at least another year. State budget cuts threaten to close the ferry but parish government and our legislative delegation remain firmly committed to keeping it operating.

Economic Development

Creating economic opportunities for residents is a primary focus of parish government. The parish continually recruits businesses to St. John while working to ensure the continued success of the 2,366 enterprises that are already operating. Promoting St. John to new employers that complement existing businesses is what continued economic development is about.

The Numbers

In 2012, St. John experienced \$38.3 million in construction of new residences, accessory buildings and home renovations. More than \$3.4 million was invested in commercial construction and additions.

Film Industry Impact

Film crews are frequently seen throughout St. John the Baptist Parish. While working here, the TV series "Memphis Beat," spent approximately \$729,000 on fuel, hotels, food, supplies and rental of the civic center. SuperCool Man Chu Too, a production company filming the major motion picture "Django Unchained," spent more than \$250,000 while shooting at Evergreen Plantation in Edgard. Additional spending by productions such as "Two Guns" resulted in a direct \$1.3 million economic impact in our parish. Nationally, Louisiana ranks third in film production activity.

Airport Runway/Infrastructure Improvements

A planned 1,100-foot extension to the 4,000-foot runway at the St. John Airport will enhance the facility's ability to serve small jets. The state, Federal Aviation Administration and Port of South Louisiana will pay for this \$2.4 million project. Also planned is a \$200,000 automated weather system for pilots funded through a grant. The Delta Regional Authority has awarded the parish \$150,000 toward collection system upgrades and a sewer lift station to accommodate the numerous businesses on Airport Road. The total project cost is \$500,000, the balance of which will be paid through a public-private partnership.

Planning & Zoning

Land Use

Identifying patterns that promote safe, sustainable and appealing development is the goal of the parish's current effort to develop a comprehensive land use plan. Research, surveys and particularly public input all figure into the final document which will guide land use.



Erosion Control

A \$3.8 million grant from Louisiana's Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) will pay for erosion control measures on the shore of Lac des Allemands near Pleasure Bend. The existing shoreline, which had been eroding at a rate of nearly 17 feet or three acres per year, will be protected.

Approximately 1,400 feet of Lake Maurepas shoreline where the Reserve Relief Canal enters the lake will also be strengthened with CIAP grant funds totaling \$1.7 million.

Health and Human Services

The Health and Human Services Building on Central Avenue in Reserve has been totally renovated to better serve citizens. A grant from the Louisiana Government Assistance Program helped fund the modernization of the building, which was constructed in 1958. Upgrades to other HHS buildings are planned.



Home Mitigation Program

Grant funds for repairs to 60 houses in St. John damaged by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike have been nearly doubled to cover work to some 110 homes. Following the selection process, more than \$2 million from a Community Development Block Grant has been secured to pay for repairs to properties owned by elderly, low income residents who otherwise could not afford to have the work done.

Summer Feeding Program

In cooperation with the school board, the parish's Summer Feeding Program served some 47,000 meals to more than 1,700 young residents at six locations. The program satisfies a critical need to provide nutritious meals to children during the summer break.



Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program – LIHEAP

Over the past year, more than 2,000 parish residents were assisted in weatherizing their homes and lowering their energy bills through LIHEAP, administered locally by HHS. For more information on this service, please contact the Health and Human Services Department.

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The parish's Internet home continues to improve, evolve and expand. Visit often and click on "E-News Updates" at the top right of the home page to receive parish news and important information via email. We welcome your input on improving our web site and making it more useful.

Hurricane Isaac

On Wednesday, August 28, Hurricane Isaac made landfall on the Louisiana coast some 95 miles southwest of New Orleans. With sustained winds of 80 miles per hour, the storm stalled along the coast before making its way through the state. The slow-moving storm caused a record storm surge in Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas and would eventually force water into some 7,000 homes in St. John the Baptist Parish.

The water rose quickly and continued to rise causing residents to be rescued from their homes and evacuated to shelters outside of the Parish. The Fire Department and Sheriff's Office, assisted by the Louisiana National Guard, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, United States Coast Guard and a host of volunteers and parish employees, performed heroic rescues for more than 48 hours, with no loss of life.

Isaac's path produced record amounts of rain and an unprecedented storm surge, basically negating recent improvements to our drainage system. There was simply no place for the water to go, which complicated efforts to restore drinking water to LaPlace, power to 95 percent of parish households and access to interstates and highways.

The investigation into why areas that have never flooded before and were not predicted to flood were under water continues. Parish President Robottom joined other River Parish officials on a trip to Washington, D.C. to visit congressional leaders and express the need to expedite funding and construction of a hurricane protection system for the parish. These efforts, as well as those to assist St. John with long-term recovery, continue today as Congress votes on a bill for supplemental funding for hurricane recovery.

"There is still much to do in St. John Parish as we continue our long-term recovery efforts," President Robottom said. "I am extraordinarily proud of our employees, law enforcement and emergency responders, many of whom worked 24 to 36 hours straight throughout the height of the storm and its aftermath. Others handled jobs far outside their normal responsibilities and did so willingly while putting regular parish business on hold until the crisis was under control and safety restored.

I am just as proud of our residents and the many faith-based and non-profit organizations and volunteers who helped their neighbors and others, clearing debris, passing out water and food, and sharing information with those with no other means of communication. Their optimism and willingness to help have been a catalyst for the success of our recovery. Many thanks to all of you!"



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Public Works/Utilities

Canals Being Cleaned

With the continued threat of flooding, 27 drainage canals on both sides of the river have been permitted for clearing and snagging and will be placed on a preventative maintenance schedule to avoid overgrowth in the future. Most of this work is being funded through state grants and inter-governmental partnerships.

Other important drainage improvements are in the design or construction phase as parish government continues to work to end chronic flooding.



Roads/Bridges

The rehabilitation of Greenwood Drive, including a new cement piling bridge to replace the aging wooden one is complete. The \$430,000 project was completed \$11,000 under budget and includes guarded walkways to ensure easy, safe access to the nearby school and park.

Cardinal Street, Persimmon Street, Captain Bourgeois Street, Parker Lane and Apple Street received asphalt overlays through the parish's Road Improvement Program totaling \$400,000, while concrete street repairs, panel and sidewalk replacements were completed at a cost of more than \$360,000.

Larger, more visible street signs have been posted at major intersections throughout the parish. More of these highly reflective signs will be installed.



Streetlights at Belle Terre/I-10

The intersection of Belle Terre Boulevard and I-10 is safer at night now that high intensity streetlights have been installed. The state paid for ninety percent of the joint \$743,500 project between the Department of Transportation and Development and the parish. St. John the Baptist Parish picked up the balance and the responsibility for maintenance.



Water and Waste Water System Improvements

The aging waterline linking the Ruddock wells to the nano-filtration station continues to be a source of problems, often interrupting water service to East Bank residents. Parish government is actively looking for a solution to these recurring issues with an alternate water source for LaPlace.

Water towers have been refurbished to ensure the continued delivery of clean, safe water to residents and businesses. New paint and a consistent color theme on the towers include names of communities where towers stand.

A \$1.4 million, low-interest loan from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality is funding repairs to wastewater lines and 80 manholes. This project will help residents who have suffered for years with sewer problems during rain events and reduce the load on the River Road Treatment Plant.

New filters are in place at the Lions water plant in Reserve and a new waterline under the river connecting the Lions and Edgard treatment plants is being designed. The project will provide residents in both communities with water should one of the water treatment facilities go off-line.

The Edgard water treatment plant has been upgraded and a new \$116,000 elevated walkway completed, providing workers with safer access to the river intake facility. A water distribution line enhancement project includes replacing a six inch line with a twelve inch one and new instrumentation to increase the flow rate throughout the West Bank system. Fire protection will also be enhanced by increasing water pressure at hydrants once completed.



Community Involvement

Members of parish government are involved in our community throughout the year, volunteering their time and talents to many worthy causes. Working together, we can make St. John an even better place to live.

(Left, T to B)
Adopt a Road

Veterans Day

Back to School Extravaganza

Clean Sweep 2012

Ezekiel Jackson Day at the Park

(Right, T to B)
Heart Health Awareness

Guns N Hoses Charity Football Game

River Region Chamber Presidents' Meeting

West Bank Martin Luther King Day Parade

Baseball Clinic

The mission of St. John the Baptist Parish government is to effectively and efficiently serve citizens in a manner that ensures transparency, ethical business practices, economic development and a healthy community.



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