

Neighbors say no to night racing

By GIL T. WEBRE

Residents of Faubourg St. John have a common desire — a nice, tranquil, beautiful, historic neighborhood.

Even though they might not be able to have it their way all the time, they hope to keep it that way at least half the time — from Easter to Thanksgiving, between seasons of the Fair Grounds racing.

The residents say they want their nights quiet when the horses are running at the Fair Grounds.

Residents of the neighborhood along Esplanade from City Park to North Broad Street see their neighborhood and nights threatened since lights have been installed at the Fair Grounds. They say the lights open the way for twilight and nighttime racing.

About 50 residents of Faubourg St. John met at Our Lady of the Rosary Church Saturday night to express opposition to night racing and any extension of the Fair Grounds season. Councilmen Mike Early and Sidney Barthelemy agreed.

The meeting was sponsored by the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association, which is circulating petitions to the state

Racing Commission, stating opposition to "night racing, twilight racing, or any racing beyond 5 p.m. Also, we do not want to see the present racing season changed," the petition says.

There are 1,000 signatures on the petition, said Pat Gomes, president of the association.

Early and Barthelemy signed it Saturday.

While agreeing with the goals of the association, Early said the City Council staff is working to find out whether the council, the Legislature or the Racing Commission control night racing in New Orleans.

Until the question is settled, members of the association are uncertain where to address their concerns.

Since parking was one of the major concerns, residents complained they were unable to park by their homes during the season because of Fair Grounds patrons' cars, Early said a residential parking program could help.

Under this program, recently enacted by the council, neighborhood residents would have unlimited parking on their streets,

and outsiders would face a time limit. Windshield stickers would identify residents.

The program could get racing patrons' cars off city streets and into commercial parking lots, Early said.

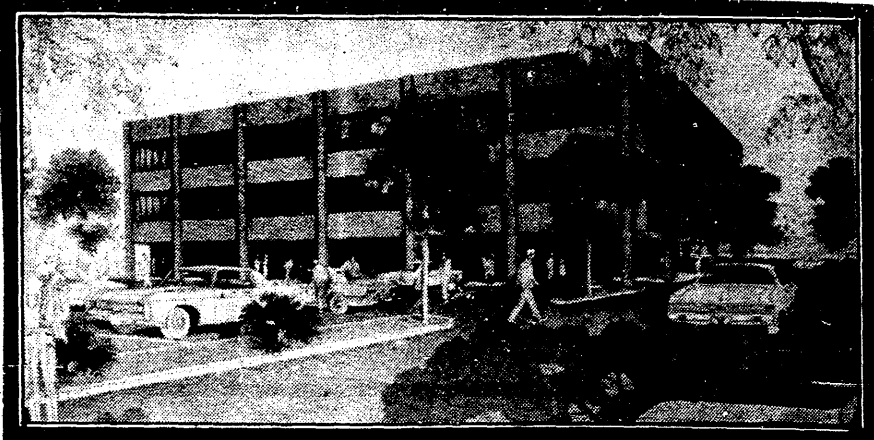
Although it's too late to start the program this year, Early said the association could petition to start the program during the next racing season.

Barthelemy said he does not think it is fair to expect residents of the neighborhood to tolerate night racing, and said he and Early will try to work out a solution.

Although most of the residents spoke against expansion of racing, citing traffic, increased crime, more noise and litter and trash in the area, the Fair Grounds and racing fans had one defender.

George B. Kennedy, who said he has lived in the neighborhood for decades, said that although those at the meeting claimed they were protesting possible night racing, they were really talking about the lifestyles of those who bet on horses.

"The Fair Grounds has contributed a lot to the city over the years," he said.



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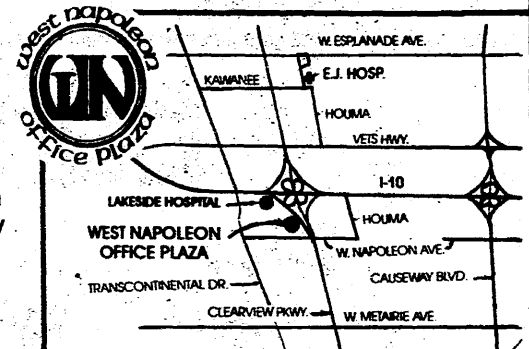
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