

## State goal: Fishing for a fortune

By GUY COATES

Associated Press writer

BATON ROUGE — The oil and gas economy that has given Louisiana caviar and limonines is running low, and the state's brain power doesn't attract hi-tech industry. So what's next?

Thus far, the newest thing in our crystal ball centers on hopping, crawling, swimming critters. That means crawfish, the frog, duck weed, oysters, shrimp, crab and such will be big money in the future. Louisiana's thoughts seem to turn to food, not computers.

This state has one of the largest wetlands areas in the nation with a coastline that features lush marshes teeming with wildlife and fish instead of tourist-drawing beaches.

These brackish marshes, a nursery area for seafood, used to be even bigger and better than now, before the abuses of the offshore oil industry — mainly the canals dredged for pipelines that opened up large areas to salt water.

The thousands of oil and gas rigs that dot the marshlands have for decades overshadowed the day-to-day fisheries operations of fun-loving Cajuns, but it still goes on.

There are so many one-family operations that big fishery industry is rare and though these coastal waters are the best on the Gulf of Mexico, few processing plants are located in the state.

Now, with oil and gas revenue declining, Louisiana State University is about to gear up a program to show the Cajuns and others how to really profit from their catches by raising domestically what used to be caught in the wild, and by increasing the catches from the wild.

The university, a leader in bio-technology, will get an infusion of research money from Gov. elect Edwin Edwards, a Cajun who believes in the switch from black gold to swimming gold. He takes office in March.

"We will provide new technology in harvesting, in packaging and processing at LSU," Edwards said.

"We have the base. We can see results within five years but actually we will be looking at a 20-year program. We will be shortly in this (bio-tech) area where California and Massachusetts were 40 years ago in computer technology at its infancy."

That suits Dudley Culley, one of LSU's crack researchers. He is fresh from a year in Brazil where he taught business interests how to increase tenfold the bull frog population by raising them in a controlled environment.

Bull frogs might not thrill the average investor who doesn't know that a frog processor can get up to \$4.50 a pound for frog legs.

The university already has worked up programs for raising crawfish, which once were harvested only from the wild.

Now, even farmers in the hill-country of north Louisiana raise crawfish and it is growing into a significant industry.

Culley also is looking at one of the most common plants in the state — duck weed.

Grown in a controlled environment, duck weed doubles its volume in two to three days, can be harvested on a 24-hour basis and has eight times the protein of soybeans.

"It's used as feed for animals but in some parts of the world it's part of the human diet," he said.

The fisheries industry, ranging from the crawfish to gulf finfish, oysters, crabs and the like, has been so overshadowed by the flashy profits of petroleum that no one has been able to get a real handle on its impact on the economy.

LSU figures the industry could amount to \$1 billion a year. Edwards said if LSU gets more money for more research, including better processing and packaging technology, "we're talking megabucks."

It all sounds too rosy, too easy and sure enough, Culley said, there is a big problem.

"We need a commitment, a change in attitude so we can spend more money to fight water pollution," he said. "This state is blessed with so much water and natural resources but there is so much pollution."

"We have been negotiating with a large international company to set up a crawfish-type operation but they are backing off because we can't guarantee water quality."

"We have not done the job of cleaning up the waters and even our groundwater is being contaminated. We can forget bio-tech if we don't control the pollution."

In coastal Louisiana, erosion by so many canals is killing the marsh and the actual coast is disappearing, he said.

"Urban development along the coast, runoff waste, sewage and industrial activity gets worse and our waters suffer," he said.

Edwards, who after the 1973 Arab oil embargo said the environment must wait, has changed his mind. "It can't wait any longer. Culley is right."

Edwards said Louisiana must spend whatever is necessary to clean the waters.



—Staff photo by Kurt Matchler

New lights illuminate the Fair Grounds as a young peanut salesman waits for the crowds to leave

## Neighbors oppose night races

By RICK RABER

Nowadays, when Faubourg St. John residents get home from a long, hard day at work, they can see light on the horizon.

And most of them don't like it one bit. "It's going to cause nothing but trouble for all of us here," said Anna Geraci, walking into her cottage on Grand Route St. John on Wednesday evening.

The \$1 million lighting system recently installed at the Fair Grounds is a harbinger of bad times for the historic, oak-shaded neighborhood next to the race track, many residents claim.

The possibility of a night racing schedule, and the throngs of fans it will bring through the darkened streets, has residents worried that existing litter, crime and parking problems will get worse.

"Night racing would make living in this neighborhood unbearable," said Pat Gomez, president of the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association. "We'd have the same problems with the crowds and crime from the track, only worse because of the darkness."

When the lights were installed at the track in September, Fair Grounds officials said they had no plans for night racing this season. The system was installed to light the late afternoon races, from about 4:30 to 6 p.m., during the winter months when darkness is a problem, they said.

However, last Sunday the Fair Grounds' first race was moved to 4:15 p.m., four hours later than usual, in what track president Joseph Dorigna described as a one-day experiment with a twilight program. He also said the night schedule was designed to eliminate competition with the Saints games.

The Fair Grounds may go to the night schedule again this season if the Saints reach the National Football League playoffs, said track attorney Louie Roussel III. Although there are no definite plans for night racing in future seasons, track officials allow for the possibility.

"I really believe it (night racing) will be successful on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays during April and the warm months," Roussel said after Sunday's trial run.

Some people living in the shotgun houses and creole cottages along the area's narrow streets said they would move rather than

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endure the problems related to night racing.

"If it comes, I will sell my house," said Warren Guidry, a four-year resident of Mystery Street. "It would destroy the tranquility of the neighborhood that we have at night. There would be no rest."

But Guidry and others said they won't leave their homes without a fight. The group plans to distribute bumper stickers with an illustration of a black light bulb saying "Stop Night Racing."

Councilman Mike Early, whose district includes the Fair Grounds, said his staff has been studying problems related to night racing. Early lives in the neighborhood, on North Lopez Street. "I share the same concerns as the rest of the neighbors," he said.

Members of the neighborhood association have been going door to door, seeking signatures to a petition they plan to send to the State Racing Commission. The petition, which urges the commission to disallow a night schedule at the Fair Grounds, already has 250 signatures, Gomez said.

The commission is composed of 10 members appointed by the governor. All schedule changes at race tracks in the state must be approved by the panel, which holds monthly meetings.

The Fair Grounds management was not required to seek commission approval to install the lighting system, said Gordon Burgess, the commission chairman. However, the track would need approval to schedule night races, and residents would have time to present their complaints before the commission, Burgess said.

"We would give their protests serious consideration," Burgess said. "We are well aware of the neighborhood program and that they are disturbed by the Fair Grounds. But they knew the track was there when they

moved in the area. If you move next to a cow farm, you expect to be smelling manure."

Friction between the management of the 112-year-old Fair Grounds and residents of the neighborhood, one of the oldest in New Orleans, is nothing new. Residents have long complained about littering and illegal parking by track fans who opt not to pay the \$2 fee to park in the Fair Grounds lot.

Robberies and vandalism also have plagued the area. "A year ago I was mugged, had my wallet taken by this guy coming out of the track," said Joseph D. Early, a 20-year Gentilly Boulevard resident who now does all his grocery shopping after 6:30 p.m. to avoid the track crowd.

Police officials acknowledge that the area is ripe for muggings and robberies during the racing season because of fans carrying money to and from the track. Extra police patrols are assigned to the area to combat the problem, said Deputy Chief Warren Woodfork.

Despite residents' complaints in recent years, the track and neighborhood have for much of the time coexisted peacefully.

During half the year, life in the quiet area is slow. Common sights are elderly residents lounging on porch chairs, young couples working on home renovations and children playing on the sidewalks.

That all changes, however, in late November when 101-day racing season begins.

Side streets like Belfort, Maurepas and Fortin come alive with slim-framed, rough-shaven men wearing faded blue jeans, cowboy hats and western-cut shirts. Most are jockeys, trainers and grooms who filter into the area when tracks in Lafayette, Bossier City and Jefferson Parish close for the season.

Track fans carrying tip sheets, racing forms and beer cans sweep through the streets on winter and spring evenings after the last race. Some shuffle slowly along, cigarettes bobbing in the darkness, moaning over badly placed bets; others stride toward their cars with wide smiles and fat wallets.

"Damn right, I'd like to see night racing," said Eddie Cole, 26, an auto mechanic who was walking down Sauvage Street after leaving the track one evening.

"I don't get off work until five; so in the daytime I'm lucky to catch two races."

The locals brace for the season's onslaught. Corner grocery stores stock up on prepared sandwiches, beer and canned foods. Experienced denizens post fortifications — sawhorses, trash cans, wooden crates — to reserve parking places. Some have painted "No Parking" in large white letters on the curbs.

While residents claim blocked driveways and double parking are still a problem, most say the situation has improved. During the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival this year, the city Streets Department began using a special towing plan for the Fair Grounds area. It is being used this racing season.

Uniformed parking control aides now patrol the nearby streets and mark illegally parked cars with bright orange stickers. This allows the police department tow trucks to remove the cars more efficiently.

"The plan has been very successful," said parking division administrator Marcia St. Martin. "It takes the decision-making away from the towers and now police patrols can spend their time looking for purse snatchers and muggers, instead of ticketing cars."

Members of the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association have invited Fair Grounds officials to attend their meeting Saturday. The members plan to ask the track management to remove the parking fee for their lots and to close the track's Fortin Street entrances. Both requests are designed to alleviate traffic congestion.

"We would like to work with them and let them know what's going on outside their gates," Gomez said. "We plan to live here a long time."

## Orleans judge gives felons chance to show they care

By ED ANDERSON

About two dozen convicted felons have become adoptive parents but adoptees are large and green and a little on the shabby side.

They're parks. Under the watchful eyes of two judges, the convicts were out Saturday cleaning and trimming in Comiskey Playground on South Jefferson Davis Parkway in the heart of Mid-City.

In the near future, they also will work at another Mid-City green spot, Pershing Park, near Tulane Avenue and South Galvez Street. The adoptions are Orleans Parish

Criminal District Court Judge Miriam G. Waltzer's way for the convicts to show public spirit.

Waltzer, accompanied by state 4th Circuit Court of Appeal Judge Israel Augustine, led the group of first-offenders, who have been placed on inactive probation for non-violent crimes.

The community service program, an alternative to jail, was started in 1977 by Augustine when he was on the Criminal District Court and has been carried on by Waltzer.

Harry's Ace Hardware provided supplies and Mandina's Restaurant

chipped in with sandwiches and potato salad Saturday.

The participants ranged from 17 to about 25 and have been convicted of minor drug offenses, forgery or petty thefts.

Waltzer said no one had been convicted of a crime such as rape or assault or serious drug violations.

As part of their rehabilitation, the probationers must attend a lecture or a self-help session once a month, visit the state penitentiary at Angola, and work at one of the two parks one Saturday a month.

"We just thought it would be a good idea to adopt the parks," the judge said, pointing out the city is strapped for money and may not be able to give the play spots the care they need.

"This is a family type thing," Waltzer said of the attitude that exists among the probationers. She said one probationer who finished his time several weeks ago continues to show up.

"This helps the city and it keeps non-violent offenders from going to jail and taxpayers money from supporting them," she said.

Waltzer said that although her crews

have worked at Comiskey Playground in the past, Saturday was the formal adoption ceremony.

She said her people also have spruced up the sandtraps at the Pontchartrain Park golf course and worked at Brechtel Park in Algiers and other playgrounds in the city.

"I want to see us clean the flagpole at Pershing Park, but we need someone to donate a large (American) flag," the judge said.

"This program is aimed at allowing these people to take on more responsibility."

Flo Schornstein, director of the city's Parkway and Park Commission, said the adopt-a-park program will help her small staff keep up Comiskey and Pershing parks.

"Our crews get there about once every three weeks," Schornstein said. "The probationers get there once very four weeks."

Without the help, she said, "the parks would not look as good as much of the time. It makes all the difference in the world in what the greenspaces look like. It enables us to stretch the resources we do have."