

‘We have to do quality work’



STAFF PHOTOS BY SCOTT THRELKELD
Repair work remains to be completed in the sanctuary at St. Augustine Catholic Church on July 9.

Hard hit by Hurricane Ida, St. Augustine Church in Treme still shuttered amid repairs

BY LEAH CLARK
Staff writer

When Hurricane Ida swept through southeast Louisiana nearly two years ago, it left destruction in its wake. As residents slowly returned to the area, some found their homes, schools, workplaces and houses of worship damaged.

St. Augustine Catholic Church in Treme was hit particularly hard.

The iron cross perched on top of the 182-year-old church's steeple was bent over sideways, pushed by Ida's winds. Windows were blown out. Water damage crumbled plaster that fell in chunks from the walls and columns. The church's rectory and parish hall also suffered damage.

"It was just shocking, the feeling of numbness," said the Rev. Emmanuel Mulenga, the Roman Catholic church's pastor of nine years.

The church wasn't in any condition to serve its parishioners. To deal with all of the problems, workers erected scaffoldings to hold up a massive metal plate



Repair work continues in the sanctuary at St. Augustine Catholic Church on July 9.

against the ceiling to keep it from falling in. Tarps were laid over the historic pews to protect them.

Two years later, St. Augustine remains shuttered, and while there's been progress, it still has far to go before repairs are finished.

Earlier this month, the church

announced repairs on its roof were complete. Work inside the sanctuary is now expected to follow. While Mulenga said the date for St. Augustine reopening is like "a moving goal post," he hopes the church will be ready in the fall.

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Phone app tracks trains crossing on Metairie Road

Live video, alerts notify users of estimated time of clearance

BY DREW BROACH
Staff writer

It wasn't long after World War II ended that Jefferson Parish officials began rethinking their decision, from 1942, to allow railroad tracks to be laid across Old Metairie. That move was designed to ease the transportation of military supplies, but as the postwar population exploded, more and more residents began to chafe at the continued disruption from freight train noise, vibration and interference with vehicular traffic, especially at Metairie Road, and to demand relief from their elected officials.

In the 1950s and '60s, Jefferson Parish tried to legislate and litigate the trains out of Old Metairie, and lost at seemingly every turn. In the 1980s and '90s, officials sought to ticket trains for blocking the Metairie Road crossing longer than the five minutes allowed by local law, until the Louisiana attorney general opined that the ordinance was unconstitutional because the railroads, being engaged in interstate commerce, were subject only to federal law.

Those fractious days are largely gone. But gone, too, are the ones that saw 28 trains per day running on Old Metairie tracks, as the state Department of Transportation reported to the Federal Railroad Administration in 1988. This year, the state agency estimates only six per day.

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Rebuilt islands off Louisiana coast providing homes for brown pelicans

BY MARK SCHLEIFSTEIN
Staff writer

The restoration of three heavily eroded islands along Louisiana's coast is providing a habitat for dwindling populations of brown pelicans and other colonial waterfowl — a sign of hope for the state bird.

Louisiana's brown pelican colonies have been in deep decline in recent years, according to Todd Baker, a biologist overseeing barrier island restoration projects for the state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority.

"In 2002, we had 30 brown pelican colonies in Louisiana. By 2010, we were down to 22, and as we stand here today, there's only nine left in Louisiana," Baker told the agency's board of directors on Wednesday. "And of those nine, three have been recently restored and three are under design (for restoration)."

While the state's restoration efforts are aimed at restoring habitat for the state's official bird, the

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Nelson says he has 10M ideas, but not \$10M, for governor bid

‘My goal is really to change the state. Governor is the means to do that’

BY TYLER BRIDGES
Staff writer

Richard Nelson is talking fast. Like always.

A 37-year-old first term state House member from Mandeville, he's the proverbial young man in a hurry as he mounts a long shot campaign for governor.

His words tumble out as he promotes the most ambitious changes sought by any of the seven candidates running to replace Gov. John Bel Edwards.

A Republican, Nelson is telling voters at every stop that he wants to phase out the state income tax and bury the power dynamic created by Huey Long almost 100 years ago that centralizes power in Baton Rouge. He also boasts of having worked with colleagues this spring to pass his bill aimed at boosting third graders' literacy, modeled after a successful measure adopted in Mississippi.

Nelson generally votes with



Editor's note: This is the first of seven profiles of the major candidates for governor.

Republicans, but he breaks with conservatives by advocating the legalization of marijuana, supporting exceptions for rape and incest for abortions and opposing the anti-LGBTQ+ measures that would ban certain books from libraries and prohibit discussion of sexuality and gender in classrooms.

"They don't solve any problems," he says of the latter two measures. "I denounce the culture wars and say they are unproductive."

Nelson said this as he was riding in his 2015 Silverado pickup while making several stops in St. Bernard Parish on Wednesday.

He talked to only a handful of voters that day — 18, to be exact — but remained upbeat throughout, even as he acknowledged that few people believe he should begin planning a move to the Governor's Mansion.

"Obviously, this is a David and

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State Rep. Richard Nelson

