

In and about Washington

January 2023
FREE—TAKE ONE



Everyone enjoyed Christmas fête

Young, old, and a few canine friends turned out on December 10 to enjoy the food, music, and fun of Washington's annual Christmas celebration.



Fontenot wins Council runoff

Washington will have two new members on the Town Council and a new police chief beginning this month.

Erick Fontenot defeated 20-year incumbent Mona Wilson in the December 10 runoff for the at-large town council seat. Fontenot got 172 votes (53%) to 152 (47%) for Wilson in the December vote. Fontenot led the three-person race on November 8, but fell short of a majority.

Mary Ann Lavergne won the District 4 seat in the November general election. She replaces Wilbert (Bobby) Ledet, who stepped down after some 40 years in office.

Also in the November general election William Worthy defeated incumbent Police Chief LaToya Trent.

Mayor Dwight Landreneau and council members Beau Wilson (District 1), Rogers Malveau (District 2), and Tanya Doucet (District 3) were unopposed.

Forty-two percent of eligible voters turned out for the December election, more than usual for recent runoffs.

Utility rate hearing

January 18

See page 3

2-In and about Washington, January 2023

Of Note

DAVID EVERITT will preach at the 10:30 a.m. service at Washington Baptist on Sunday, January 15. A youth program is held each Wednesday at 6 p.m.

THE HEALTH BUGGY provides free screening for blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol on the Immaculate Conception parking lot from 8 to 11 a.m. each third Friday.

Santa brought North Pole weather

A blast of Arctic air dropped temperatures 40 degrees in 12 hours, from 57 at 5:30 p.m. December 22 to 17 degrees at 5:30 a.m. December 23, then stayed through the Christmas weekend. The thermometer stood at 23 degrees at dawn on Christmas morning.

THE WEATHER December 1-27

High: 81, Dec. 8
Average High: 60.3
Low: 17, Dec. 23
Average Low: 47.0
Dec. Rainfall: 6.42
Avg. Dec. Rain: 4.38
Rain for 2022: 46.37
Avg. Yearly: 52.79



Decoration winners

Robert and Melanie Weaver were first-place winners in the residential category, and Southern Strands Salon & Boutique topped the business category in the Christmas decoration contest. The residences of Mire and Tommy LeLeux and Jim and RoseMarye Bradshaw tied for second place. Washington State Bank and Thrif-T-Way Pharmacy placed second and third in the business entrants.

Phil Wartelle dies at age 94

Phil Wartelle, scion of a pioneering Washington family, died December 17 at his childhood home on Church Street. He was buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery after services at Immaculate Conception Church.

He graduated from Washington High and UL-Lafayette (then Southwestern Louisiana Institute), served in the Navy during World War II, then worked for 25 years for Monterrey Pipeline in Baton Rouge. He and his wife, Mae Budden Wartelle, bought the family home and returned to Washington on his retirement. Mae Wartelle died in 2018. He is survived by two sons and a daughter.



Apply January 24 for energy bill help

The St. Landry Community Action Agency will accept applications from Washington residents for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) on January 24 from 9 a.m. until 10 a.m. at the Community Center on Veterans Memorial Boulevard (Hwy. 103).

More information is available on the Web at townofwashington.la.



Historic markers

Signs marking the historic core of old Washington and telling bits of the history of old homes and businesses (in background) have been put up as part of the effort to promote walking tours throughout the town.

Town out from under auditor's eye

Washington's finances have improved enough that the legislative auditor will no longer keep an eagle eye on the town's books.

Auditor Mike Waguespack notified Mayor Dwight Landreneau that "due to ... improvements in the fiscal health of ... Washington, we have determined that ... monitoring by our Advisors is no longer needed." He said the decision was based on resolution of several specific concerns and an overall improvement in the town's financial situation.

The notice ends years of close scrutiny dating at least to 2019, when the town was listed among "fiscally distressed municipalities" that the auditor feared "may not be able to continue to provide basic services." There were fears that the state would take over the administration of the town.

Since assuming office in February 2020, Landreneau has sliced the town budget, sold surplus property, and found several hundred thousand dollars in grants to bolster the budget.

CPA Burton Kolder, who audits Washington's finances, reported in November that the town finished the last budget year with a small operating surplus, for the first time in years, and that old debt has been cut from nearly \$700,000 two years ago to \$283,000.



Entrance overlay

Workers from the state highway department overlaid and striped parts of Veterans Memorial Boulevard (Highway 103) near the I-49 exit and at Main Street in early December.

From Town Hall

UTILITY RATES will likely be increased at the January 18 Town Council meeting. An ordinance was introduced at the December meeting after an audit showed gas, water, and sewer operations had a combined loss of \$83,489 in the last budget year. Under law, the utilities must generate enough income to cover costs. Mayor Dwight Landreneau said rates will not be increased "any more than absolutely necessary." A public hearing will be held before the regular council meeting.

THE COUNCIL meeting will be moved this month only from the third Monday of the month to the third Wednesday, January 18, because of the Martin Luther King holiday.

THE TOWN'S new Facebook page is Historic Washington, Louisiana. It can be accessed on the town website at townofwashington.la.

Send items for *In and About Washington* to jimbradshaw4321@gmail.com.

4-In and about Washington, January 2023

Washington's oaks have seen hundreds of years of history

The large live oak across from the post office on East Moundville Street was probably just a sapling when the settlement that became Washington began on Bayou Courtableau. Experts say that it is more than 300 years old, and it is just one of the massive oaks that shade us today.

Over the centuries these ancient trees have survived flood, fire, war, and the simple ravages of time – as has the town that grew up around them. The Louisiana Live Oak Society lists some 200 oaks in St. Landry Parish that are certified to be more than 100 years old. Nearly one-fourth of them – 45 trees – are in Washington or close by.

The unique society was founded in 1934 by Dr. Edwin Lewis Stephens, the first president of Southwestern Louisiana Institute (UL - Lafayette) to promote the preservation and appreciation of the live oak tree, scientifically known as *Quercus virginiana*.

The society is made up of the trees themselves. Only one human member is permitted under the by-laws drawn up by Stephens. That person is the chairman, who is responsible for registering and recording the Live Oak Society members (the trees). The current chairman is Coleen Perilloux Landry of the Louisiana Garden Club Federation, which now oversees the Live Oak Society. A full list of the trees and information on how to nominate a tree is on the Live Oak Society website.

The society began with 43 members chosen by Dr. Stephens and now boasts 9,693 trees in 14 states. The president of the society is the biggest known tree. The first one was the Locke Breaux Oak in the Taft community in St. Charles Parish. It died in 1968 due to air and ground water pollution. Its successor and current president is the Seven Sisters Oak on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain near Mandeville. It has a girth of more than 38 feet and tree experts say it is 1,200 years old.

To become a member of the society, a tree must have a girth of at least eight feet, measured four and a half feet from the ground. The Moundville Street tree in Washington measures some 22 feet in girth. It is registered with the Live Oak Society as the Louis Juchereau de St. Denis Oak, in commemoration of the soldier and explorer who helped settle colonial French Louisiana. It was recognized as Washington's oldest oak tree and proclaimed the Washington Tricentennial Oak by the Tricentennial Commission in 2020. More than a dozen other trees in Washington are 21 to 15 feet around, indicating that they are at least 200 years old.

The Lastrapes Oak, outside the town limits on Highway 182 midway between Washington and the Nuba intersection, is 27 feet around, but is actually several trees grown together. It stands on the property where the Jean Henri Lastrapes house once stood. According to an old story, Lastrapes one day ordered some of his men to go into the woods and dig up seven young live oak trees, one for each of his boys. These were brought in late in the evening and Lastrapes had them set into a single hole with the intention of later planting them separately. For reasons unknown, that never got done.



Looking Back

In and About
Washington

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