

In and about Washington

June 2024
FREE—TAKE ONE



Mayor Dwight Landreneau and administrative assistant Anne Jones met with national park rangers Laura McDonald and Jody Baque to discuss youth programs planned for Washington this summer.

Summer youth program starts June 7

The Prairie Acadian Cultural Center will host free children's programs for second through sixth graders at the Washington recreation center on Martin Luther King from 10 a.m. to noon on the first Friday of June, July, and August.

"Each month, we will do one junior ranger program, one reading program and craft, and one fun activity (bingo, crafting, learning to cast for fishing, etc.)," park ranger Laura McDonald said. "Each month has a theme: June is wildland fire, July is fishing, and August is all about the National Park Service (it's our birthday month)."

The June 7 program will include a wildland fires junior ranger program, Read with a Ranger, and instruction on making clay pots.

On July 5 the program will offer an angler junior ranger program, Read with a Ranger, and a backyard bass fishing game.

A centennial junior ranger program will lead the August 2 program. Read with a Ranger will again be offered, followed by national park bingo.

Pre-registration is not required. Free snacks will be provided at each session. Participants can earn a badge each month.

Budget shows 'tremendous' financial improvement

The budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1 will show "tremendous" improvement in town finances, according to Mayor Dwight Landreneau.

The new budget was introduced by title at the May town council meeting and will be detailed and adopted this month. It will likely be similar to the town's austere budgets over the past several years. That tight control on spending has paid off, the mayor said.

"The 2024-2025 budget will show tremendous improvement in the past debt," Landreneau said. "In 2020 we inherited a \$750,000 debt. That past due debt now stands at \$86,000. If things continue on this path, we should have the past due debt paid off by the end of this fiscal year."

The budget for the fiscal year that ends June 30 anticipated income of about \$1.8 million and expenses totaling about \$1.6 million. The new budget will likely be in that range.

The budget does not include state or federal grants, both of which have contributed significantly to town finances in recent years. They cannot be budgeted until they are received.

2-In and about Washington, June 2024

Of Note

THE ST. LANDRY Community Action Agency will take applications for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program from Washington residents from 9 to 11 a.m. on June 17 at the Community Center on Veterans Memorial (Hwy. 103). Proof of need is required. Only the first 20 households will be accepted, Call 337 948-3651 for details.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL at Washington Baptist will be held June 16-19, beginning at 6 p.m. There will be a free supper every night

THE SHILOH BAPTIST Vacation Bible School will be from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on June 17-19. The theme will be God's Superheroes: Adventures in Faith. Free refreshments will be served.

THE WASHINGTON Cemetery Foundation is accepting donations via the Venmo payment app. Donations may also be made by check to Washington Cemetery Foundation, P.O. Box 42, Washington 70589.

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



Members cited at Garden Club social

Claire White and Tamie Richard were honored as women of the year, Catherine St. Cyr and Susan Tinney were given lifetime achievement awards, and Valerie Chachere received the distinguished service award at the Washington Garden Club's year-end garden party at the Michel Prudhomme home in Opelousas.



Education staff honored

The Washington Garden Club and Steamboat City Association partnered in May to honor the education staff at Washington Elementary School and Washington Career and Technical School with a breakfast.



Help with trip

The Steamboat City Association donated funds to Washington Elementary to help with a student trip to Montgomery, Alabama. Shown are Charles Landreneau SCA president; Charles Johnson representing Washington Elementary; and Anne Jones, SCA treasurer.

THE WEATHER

NOAA Forecast: Hotter and wetter than normal June, July, and August, scary hurricane season.

May 1-27

High: 96, May 27
Avg. High: 85.7
Low: 60, May 1
Avg. Low: 72.3
Avg. Temp: 79.0
5-year Avg. 75.5
May Rainfall: 10.43
Avg. for May: 5.43
Rain for 2024: 34.47
20-year Avg.: 22.30

Store renovated

While hundreds of Family Dollar stores are being permanently closed nationally, the store in Washington was closed for two weeks for renovation





Baton Rouge visit

The Washington public works and clerical staff along with the mayor and council members toured the state capitol and visited with Sen. Gerald Boudreaux and Rep. Dustin Miller on May 22. “This was a great opportunity for us to learn about how the government process works,” mayor Dwight Landreneau said.

Water system improves to top grade

The Washington water system got high marks in the Louisiana Health Department’s annual evaluation of water quality and the system’s overall performance. The town improved from a B grade in 2022 to an A grade with 97 out of 100 points in the 2023 ratings.

The health department letter grade is based on an evaluation of the infrastructure, accountability, and overall health risk of drinking water to consumers. The guidelines include state and federal water quality standards, the financial stability of the system, operation and maintenance procedures, the system’s infrastructure, water contaminants, and customer satisfaction.

The system was dinged slightly for customer satisfaction and for levels of iron or manganese in the water which, according to the department, “do not pose a health risk but may cause undesirable water quality issues.” Those deductions were offset by bonus points given for the general management of the system.

Court keeps new congressional map – for now

Washington voters will likely pick a new congressman after the US Supreme Court ordered the state to use a map with two majority-Black districts in the fall election.



The order, issued May 15, suspends, but does not overturn, a lower court ruling that the new districts approved by the legislature were based on illegal racial gerrymandering. The Supreme Court ruling does not deal with that ruling, but allows the map to stay in place at least through this year’s election.

The plan redraws the 6th Congressional District (pink area on map) so that it stretches diagonally across central Louisiana from Caddo to St. Landry parishes, including the Town of Washington.

From Town Hall

A TOWN COUNCIL

resolution adopted at the May meeting authorizes the mayor “to enter into [a] partnership with [the] St. Landry Economic Development District that leads to establishment of an economic development district within the Town of Washington.”

REGULAR MEETINGS

of the Town Council are at 6 p.m. on each third Monday at Town Hall.

UTILITY CUSTOMERS

are reminded that bill payments are due on the 17th of each month and that payments received after 3 p.m. are posted on the next business day. A \$10 late fee is charged if the bill is not paid on time

4-In and about Washington, June 2024

Gordon Street named for ill-starred steamer captain

Gordon Street is named after John H. Gordon Sr., an early steamboat captain and business owner in Washington, although he probably didn't live on that street. He built the house that still stands at 604 South Main Street about 1834 and lived there until his death in 1853.

Captain Gordon was born in Geneva, New York, in 1801. He first shows up in the records here in 1832, when he was master of the steamboat *Paul Clifford*. He married Lydia Elizabeth Moore in St. Landry Parish in 1833.

In 1835 he was captain and part owner of the steamboat *St. Landry*, and in 1837 was captain and an owner of the *Correo*. He and several partners owned the steamer *Jacques Dupre* from 1838 to 1840.

He apparently was a good and reliable captain, but is best remembered because he was in charge of the *Elizabeth* when it exploded in one of the worst accidents in our steamboat history. The *St. Landry Whig* reported in April 1845 that the boat was at the junction of the Courtableau and the Atchafalaya, when "her boilers collapsed, and completely tore her upper works to atoms."

First mate Daniel York was killed by the explosion. Three other crewmen were blown overboard and never found. Captain Gordon and first engineer James Marquise were "very badly scalded and bruised." Luckily, the passengers were in rooms well away from the explosion and were "uninjured, except a few, who were slightly bruised."

"The Captain was at his duty at the time of the explosion—though it took place between 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning—and had just given some orders in relation to the safety of the boat. The next thing he knew, he was rising into the air, and then fell among the ruins upon the deck, when the hot chimney fell on him, breaking two ribs and burning him dreadfully," according to the news account.

It's not clear whether he returned to the pilothouse after that accident, but he did remain active in boat-related businesses. He and two partners bought a share of a steamboat warehouse from Captain Joseph Bercier in 1850, and in 1852 they bought part ownership of the steamer *Jenny Lind* from Bercier, Oramel Hinckley, and James Johnston.

According to Cheryl Bihm Meyers' exhaustive account of the early families of Washington, Captain Gordon was an early victim of the yellow fever epidemic that raged through Washington in 1853. The *Opelousas Courier* carried a brief notice of his death on May 12 of that year, but gives no cause of death. He was buried in the Church Landing Cemetery, also known as the yellow fever cemetery because of the number of victims buried there. If Meyers is right, he must have been one of the first to die from the outbreak that year. Most of the deaths during that epidemic were in the summer months.

He left an estate that reflected a continued association with Bayou Courtableau boats, including part ownership of the flatboat *Long Tom* and of the steamboat *Orpheus*. His widow sold the Main Street residence to Abraham Millspaugh in 1871.



Looking Back

In and About
Washington

Member
FDIC

is underwritten by



