

Launch Leeville celebrates town's rebirth; Over 100 attend meet and greet social

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To paraphrase Lieutenant Governor Jay Dardenne's recollection of the writing of Harnet Kane, Leeville is a place that can't make up its mind if it's land or water.

Every year it becomes more the latter than the former.

Without any protection from either coastal erosion or rising tides, and shadowed by the giant bridge and elevated highway which have caused the town to "shrink" further, Leeville has been wondering if it is going to simply wash away.

But two recent events have given residents and protectors of Leeville some spiritual hope, if nothing else.

Last month, the final pieces of the puzzle which is the Leeville Public Boat Launch came together. The \$1.5 million launch will become a reality, probably opening in the late spring of 2014.

The parish-owned launch will have about 50 parking slots, drawing more fishermen to the area and giving them another choice in where to put in, while relieving the overflowing parking conditions in the town.

Even earlier this year Leeville became a "cultural district". Through this designation, certain tax breaks and incentives will be realized by the residents and businesses of Leeville, hopefully boosting the finances of a town hard-hit by the opening of the elevated highway.

The Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, through Dardenne's office, made the announcement in July, saying the goal of this designation for Leeville is "to spark community revitalization based on cultural activity through tax incentives".

Over 100 people were in Leeville Friday for a "meet and greet social" and press conference at the invitation of Launch Leeville, the launch advocacy group. The party's purpose was to announce the launch project and Leeville's cultural designation and thank everyone involved.

The get-together featured Dardenne but included State Representative Jerry "Truck" Gisclair, Parish President Charlotte Randolph, Councilmen Daniel Lorraine and Jerry Lafont, and other community and business members who joined in celebrating a rebirth of Leeville.

Calling the town a "destination and not just a place on a map", Dardenne said Leeville's greatest days are ahead of it.

Parish Councilman Daniel Lorraine, in whose district the launch is to be built, took some of the credit for its creation, having introduced legislation to get the project going.

"Today we have lunch, but soon we will have a launch," he joked.

The launch has been in and out of “dream state” for over two years, but Friday many parish dignitaries and local businessmen and women agreed that Leeville is alive again.

“We need to remember Leeville for all it provided us in the past. It is also an important part of the recreation and culture of Lafourche Parish,” said President Randolph.

But the person who should take the credit for what many recognize as a revitalization of the small town is Janet Rhodus, a transplanted Baton Rougean who saw the need and pushed the project until it finally became a reality.

Dardenne called it “an initiative which, like all good ones, started from the bottom up with one citizen. She (Rhodus) motivated people in government, like me, who needed a push.”

Rhodus created Launch Leeville to draw attention to the need for a public launch in the town. She met with Dardenne in January, he said, to try to get Leeville a designation as a cultural district, the first in Lafourche Parish.

She has been the unqualified catalyst for Leeville’s brighter future.

“This is happening because of Janet’s initiative. She motivated people in government who needed a push—like me,” said Dardenne.

At Friday’s ceremony, Launch Leeville also happily received a \$12,000 check from Henri Boulet, compliments of the Louisiana Seafood Festival Foundation, Inc.

Rhodus promised to use the money and other funds for a list of projects in Leeville. A public fishing pier is planned next to the launch, she said.

The group will host an annual kayak fishing rodeo, and is marketing Leeville as a national kayak fishing destination.

Launch Leeville is planning a pathway through the town featuring hotels, restaurants, docks and stores, a Heritage Festival and Arts Retreat, a tourism center, and a Marsh/Birding walk along Hwy. 1.

Dardenne wrapped up his visit by calling Leeville the “greatest fishing place in the world.”

“The launch has come about because people in government listened,” he said, and called the project a springboard that creates economic development in Leeville.

Comments

Janet Rhodus, Launch Leeville : We served over 300 people at the event, what a great turnout. We appreciate the public’s support of Leeville, no longer a forgotten fishing village!