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New deputy chief

looks back on past as she prepares for the future

By Amber McDow
Specht Newspapers

After over 13 years of working as the school resource officer (SRO) at Minden High School, Tokia Harrison was recently appointed the position of deputy chief for the Minden Police Department. This is the first time that the Minden Police Department has had a deputy chief, but it was a position that Chief Jared McIver wanted Harrison to fill as soon as he was elected. “She’s going to be my right arm,” said Chief McIver as soon as the election results were in last November. The position is interim until she passes her final test, but Harrison feels confident that she is prepared to do so.

Working with high school students for so many years has definitely prepared Deputy Chief Harrison for whatever surprises and changes may come.

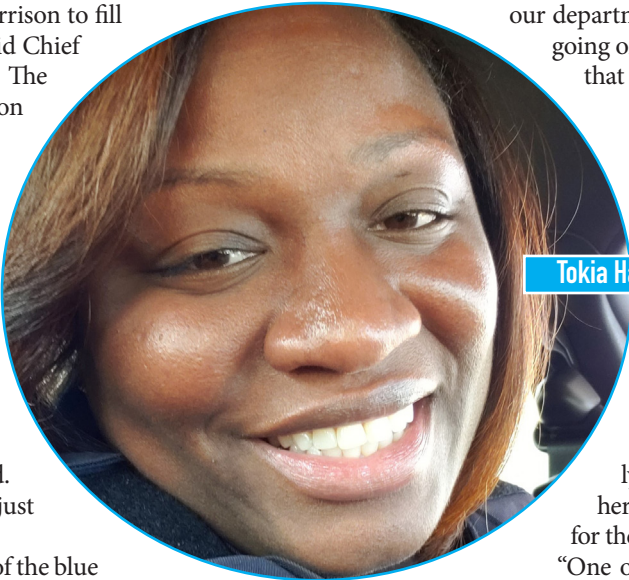
“I loved going to work every day, even when bad things were going on,” said Deputy Chief Harrison. “That’s how I know it was my purpose, because I enjoyed it. I built a lot of relationships. It was bittersweet leaving.

“But it definitely prepares you. You learn all the different personalities and different types of people and circumstances that you’ll have to tackle. It also taught me to be even more of a leader. It brought out things in me that I didn’t know I had. People will tell me I’m doing great things, but I feel like God is just doing His thing, and I’m just trying to please Him.

“When I get kids who become officers or who inbox me out of the blue and tell me that I really made a change in their lives, it makes what you do go through worth it. And I like to focus on the positive; if you dwell on the positive and you keep your mind set there, you make what your day’s going to be. You make how your life’s going to go with how you think.

“Another way that being an SRO prepared me is by helping me build relationships with students and their parents. Knowing people helps because they trust you.”

Harrison takes her new role very seriously. She wants to learn everything she can to help the department become more professional and to strengthen the trust of the community. She looks forward to being Chief McIver’s right hand and supporting his initiatives for the



Tokia Harrison

department. Harrison wants to find more ways for the community and individuals to interact with the police department in positive ways. She’s very open to people giving suggestions or pointing out problems.

“Come in and give your suggestions because it might be something that helps our department,” said Harrison. “It might be something we don’t know is going on. I want to be someone who listens and who lets people know that they’re being heard.”

If you want to make a complaint, Harrison will be there to listen to you. “I’m going to get both sides, and I’m going to investigate it. You’re going to get a thorough investigation of your complaints, no matter how minor it is. Whatever actions need to be taken will be taken. What can be known will be known, but we have HIPAA.” This means that they are not permitted, under federal law, to disclose certain things such as details pertaining to the disciplinary actions taken. “If I can’t tell you, I can’t tell you. But just trust that it’s being handled.”

As deputy chief, Harrison will be available to make decisions when Chief McIver is not, which can speed up how quickly some situations are addressed. She also takes the wellbeing of her fellow officers very seriously, and wants to look out not only for their physical safety but their mental and emotional health as well.

“One of my roles is to make sure that officers are okay, so they can make good decisions in that split second,” said Harrison. “You’ve got a normal level of adrenalin. We’re always above that. It takes about 24 hours to reset your body [from an adrenal crash], but we’ve got to be back to work before that.” For this reason, she’s always on the lookout for officers who seem to be under additional stress.

When asked what she wants out of this position, Harrison said, “I just want to make my family, especially my daughter and my husband, and my babies [former students] all proud, and give them something to look up to. I want the community to know that I’m going to do the best I can to the best of my ability. I’m here for them. Community is number one. Anytime you need me, you can always reach me.”

From the Mayor

Roughly half a year has passed since Mayor Nick Cox took office, and he took the time to share what he and the City Council have done so far and plans that they have for the future.

A self-described pragmatist, Mayor Cox has spent the better part of his term so far trying to optimize the city and make things run more efficiently. Along with the Mayor and Council, a fresh sweep in leadership throughout the city has led to a fresh outlook on how things operate and how they can be improved upon.

"There are things we can do to be more efficient. That's what I enjoy, trying to tinker with things and make them better, as long as the people let me be here," said Cox.

"I am extremely proud of where we're at as a city at the moment. This year we have a new fire chief, public works director, parks and recreation director, new mainstreet director, a new position of deputy chief of police, a battalion chief position for the fire department. We've come a long way in six and a half months. I'm proud of everyone we hired and appointed.

"Our council is made up of business minded people that look at the city as a whole. They all represent their district well, and they see the bigger picture, helping each other's district as well. We're blessed to have that Council."

One of the things the Mayor was proud to mention was their decision to hire a lobbyist for the city of Minden. In short, a lobbyist serves to represent Minden in Baton Rouge, most notably when there is money to be budgeted.

Mayor Cox initially got the idea to retain a lobbyist while working on the Police Jury and getting advice from Bill Altimus.

"When I was on the Police Jury, I went to Bill Altimus in Bossier Parish. He was the administrator of the parish over there. He's since retired, but he, in my opinion, is a genius when it comes to running municipal government. In my opinion, he's a big reason Bossier Parish is as successful as it is," said Cox.

"We visited for a while and I asked, 'Bill, if I had \$50,000 extra in Webster Parish, where would you tell me to spend it. I had several ideas about what he might say, like spend \$50,000 and invest in this, or spend \$50,000 and get some software. He said hands down, without a second thought I'd hire a lobbyist. I never dreamed he would say a lobbyist.

"He said, well if you don't have a seat at the table you get nothing. And you don't even know to ask. You'll be so unaware you don't even know you can ask for stuff. I didn't forget that."

Cox stated that the decision to get a lobbyist for the city has already returned on investment, from obtaining funding for smaller projects like road striping, Christmas decorations, the animal shelter, and even bigger projects like a multi million capital outlay project for the water tank.

"The cost associated with having a lobbyist is fractional compared to the money she could potentially give us," said Cox.

"My attention gets put on what happens within our boundaries. But some of the best opportunities are outside of Minden's borders, such as federal grants, state grants, and also state capital outlay.

"This particular type of lobbyist is for the state level. She lives in Baton Rouge. She's originally from the Shreveport/Bossier area, so she's very passionate about Northwest Louisiana municipalities. Her job on behalf of the City of Minden is to be a Minden representative in Baton Rouge.

"It gets us a seat at the table, and if we don't have a seat at the table, we're the meal. Meaning

the money goes somewhere else. What we should be getting, we weren't getting, because we didn't ask for it. The Bible says if you don't ask, you ain't getting it."

Another project the Mayor was excited to mention as that of the Public Works Control Center. This would be the creation of a new building to consolidate the employees of various public works departments under one roof, helping to make manning the positions easier as well as being cheaper overall to run.

"We'll be able to consolidate employees. Right now we have 24/7 day a week employees doing shift work at the steam plant watching the electrical control system, and at the water plant watching the water control system," said Cox.

"If we combine the water and the electrical in one control room, they'll be able to help one another, be cross trained, and we'll be better manned.

"Let's take what we have spread out across the city, and combine it to make it work better. I've spent most of this year tweaking my department leadership to try and make it work more efficiently, and it's getting better. I'm happy with where we're at."

The building itself will cost half a million dollars to build, but the Mayor believes this to be a worthwhile investment, both to update the facilities that city employees work in, as well as the cost savings in the long term from consolidating multiple separate offices throughout the city under one roof.

Mayor Cox has also been focused on the city's presentation, from projects such as new lighting along I20, overlay projects for the Minden Airport, and buckling down on condemned properties.

"If you're driving down I10, are you ever going to pull off on an exit that's not lit. You're not going to do it. First of all it's dangerous looking, and second of all it doesn't look like it's open for business," said Cox.

"We had an opportunity to get 90% of the lighting project funded for new lights. The lights that we do have are dim, so it's time for an upgrade. The state makes the projects and they turn it over to the city, The city of Minden has to pay the light bill. If the bulbs go out, the City of Minden has to replace them. If it gets damaged, we have to fix it.

"These will help the city because they're energy efficient, we can lower the masts like a flag, bring the lights to the ground, change the lightbulb and raise it back up, whereas the other ones, you had to get a bucket truck on I20 because of electric costs."

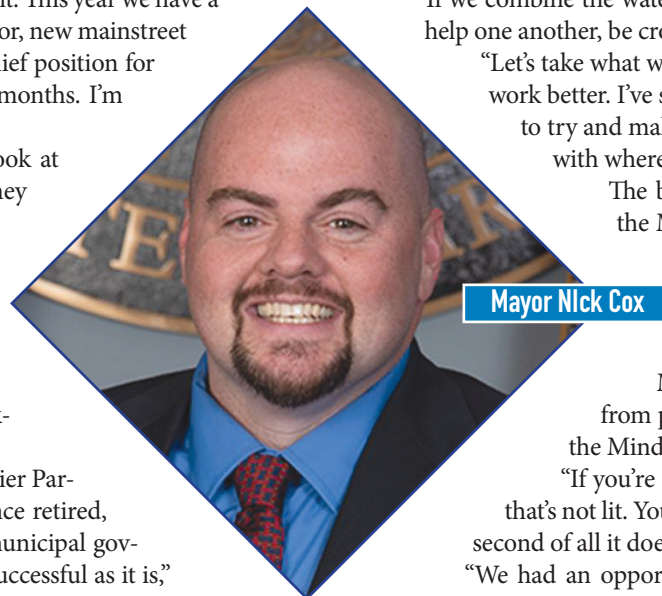
As mentioned previously, the Mayor and Council have also been cracking down on condemned properties. It's gotten to a point where a lot of properties that they are eyeing end up getting dealt with because word is getting around about how serious this administration is on the issue.

"I think people in Minden know that we want to be proud of our city, and put our best foot forward," said Cox.

"There have been several occasions where word got out that we were kind of eyeing a property that needed some attention, then I'll drive by and it'll be torn down. People are taking care of business because people know that this council and this administration is not playing around with condemned properties."

Even in the short amount of time they've been in office, Mayor Cox states that he is proud of the work being done by his administration to get Minden moving forward.

"I think the Council and myself are not passive. This group right here, we want to do something with the opportunity the good lord gave us. We want to move the needle forward while we have the time to do it. I'm proud of where we're at," said Cox.



Flags renewed

during flag dedication ceremony

By Amanda McDow
Specht Newspapers



On July 4, the annual flag changing ceremony was held at Eagle Park on Turner's Pond. Jerry Madden led the ceremony and members of the American Legion as well as representatives of the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines lowered the old flags and replaced them with new ones.

Mayor Nick Cox spoke, saying, "I pass Eagle Park every day, and I think about all those local heroes that served our country. I'm so glad to live in the United States, and I'm also so proud to live in the City of Minden, a place where we take pride in those heroes who served so willingly and a place that values the way our flags look."

The ceremony included the singing of the National Anthem, a prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, a reading of the American's Creed, and the presentation of the memorial wreath to the accompaniment of Taps played on a trumpet.

Roy Kirkham was recognized posthumously for his extended services to the United States. His daughter, Renee, and her husband accepted a certificate of resolution acknowledging his many accomplishments.

The late Captain Ter-

ry Snook's many services to his community and country were also recognized. His wife was present to accept this acknowledgement. Snook will soon have his plaque added to the Wall of Honor in Eagle Park.

Before the changing of the flags, Madden spoke about researching a soldier of the American Revolution, Colonel Arthur Campbell, and he urged his fellow citizens to learn more about their ancestors and their accomplishments. "We all have a past. We all have a history. Be proud of your family; be proud of what they did," said Madden.



Jacie Brent

crowned as 70th Miss Minden!

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO BEGIN PARTICIPATING IN SCHOLARSHIP PAGEANTS?

I had been watching the Miss Minden, Miss Louisiana, and Miss America Pageants ever since I was a little girl. I had always admired each one of the women competing and dreamed of being up there myself someday. My sister was the first to start competing in the Miss America system because she really wanted to be Miss Minden and after she won in 2019, she encouraged me to compete. That dream came true in 2020, when I was crowned with my first title, "Miss Cane River". I loved the whole experience and being a part of the pageant sisterhood made it even more special. However, my ultimate goal was always to be Miss Minden one day and I finally achieved that goal on January 7th of this year. There is just something so special about getting the opportunity to represent your hometown. The overwhelming support I have felt from Minden has meant the world to me and I look forward to continue serving this community throughout the rest of my reign.

WHAT IS YOUR COMMUNITY SERVICE INITIATIVE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU?

My CSI is "Nothing But Positive". It focuses on replacing negative thoughts and words with positive ones, in order to encourage others and boost one's own self-love, self-worth, and self-esteem. I began struggling with self-confidence and body image issues when I was just 8 years old and it is still a daily struggle for me because you have to make a conscious decision to be kind to yourself. My CSI is so important to me because it is something I have personally dealt with and many people can relate to it, as well. Both men and women are shamed openly for being overweight, underweight, too tall, too short, etc. by society's standards. Sadly, not only do people hear it from those around them, but many often do what I have done in the past and engage in negative self-talk, getting angry at themselves for not fitting into that "perfect mold." This verbal abuse and body shaming can lead to low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, or even suicide. I want people to realize that they are not defined by their physical appearance. I want to spread my message of self-love and positivity everywhere I go, so no one is made to feel unacceptable because of how they look.

HOW HAS YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE PAGEANT INFLUENCED YOUR PERSONAL GROWTH AND SELF-CONFIDENCE?

When I first started competing in the Miss America System, I just did it for fun to see what it was like and it was really more of a learning experience. The first time I went to Miss Louisiana, I had my own sister by my side, but then I met all of the other amazing women in the organization and I realized it's so much more than all the glitz and glamour people think it is. The sisterhood this organization provides is really why I have continued competing because they truly do lift you up. When I started competing, the swimsuit portion had been removed, but this year at state, a fitness portion was added back into the competition. I admit, I was really struggling with my body image issues and was in my head a lot in the beginning, but once I got to the competition, I can honestly say that I have never felt more confident in what I presented onstage this year. That is growth! Even though I didn't believe in myself, my community, my friends, my family, my job, and all of my pageant sisters encouraged, supported, and believed in me and for that I am truly grateful. I have gained so much more confidence in who I am as a person. My public speaking and especially my talent has improved significantly and that is something I am very proud of.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE EXPERIENCE FROM YOUR MISS MINDEN REIGN THUS FAR?

Pretty much every experience! I have done my best to attend every local event I am able to in Minden, as well as in the surrounding areas, and I have met so many sweet people who have offered me their support and encouragement. I would say my most memorable experience was when I presented a \$1,600 check to St. Jude that I raised by selling my hometown T-shirts. It was so special for me to present my own check at the auction as Miss Minden because I truly felt like I was contributing to helping the kids at St. Jude. I would say my favorite volunteer experience was playing with the kids at the Miracle League Northshore in Covington. This nonprofit organization gives children with disabili-

ties the opportunity to play sports, such as baseball, soccer, and basketball. I was able to be a "buddy" to some of the athletes and it is something I will never forget. Watching those precious kids and seeing them light up because they were able to participate in a team sport was so special and made me realize all the things I take for granted every day. At Miss Louisiana, my most exciting experience was when I won the "Women in Mass Communications" award for the 3rd time and earned more scholarship money to apply towards my student loans. I could seriously go on and on because being Miss Minden has allowed me too many wonderful experiences to count and I will cherish each and every memory I've made forever.

AS MISS MINDEN WHAT GOALS DID YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE DURING YOUR REIGN THIS YEAR?

My goal this year was to be as active in the community as possible. I feel like I have done that and will continue to serve any way that I can until my reign is over. I planned to do a T-Shirt fundraiser for St. Jude and present a check as Miss Minden and I achieved that goal. I planned to hand out positivity bands everywhere I went as a visual reminder to speak kind things to yourself and others and I have been able to do that at several parades and various events in the community. I planned to go into schools and speak to them about my Community Service Initiative, "Nothing But Positive", and I have gotten to do that, as well. My hope is that every person I meet walks away feeling like I truly care about them, because I do. I have had little girls and even teens come up to me after pageants/events or leave me messages on social media telling me that I am an inspiration to them and that they feel like they can compete now because they have seen me up there and that is truly what being a titleholder is all about. It is about being a role model, a mentor, and somebody that makes everybody feel like a somebody. My goal has always been to make people feel loved, accepted, and included, and that they matter. I hope my legacy as Miss Minden be just that.



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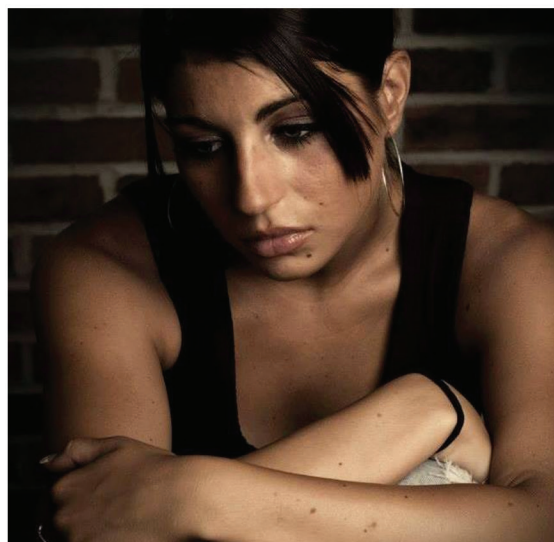
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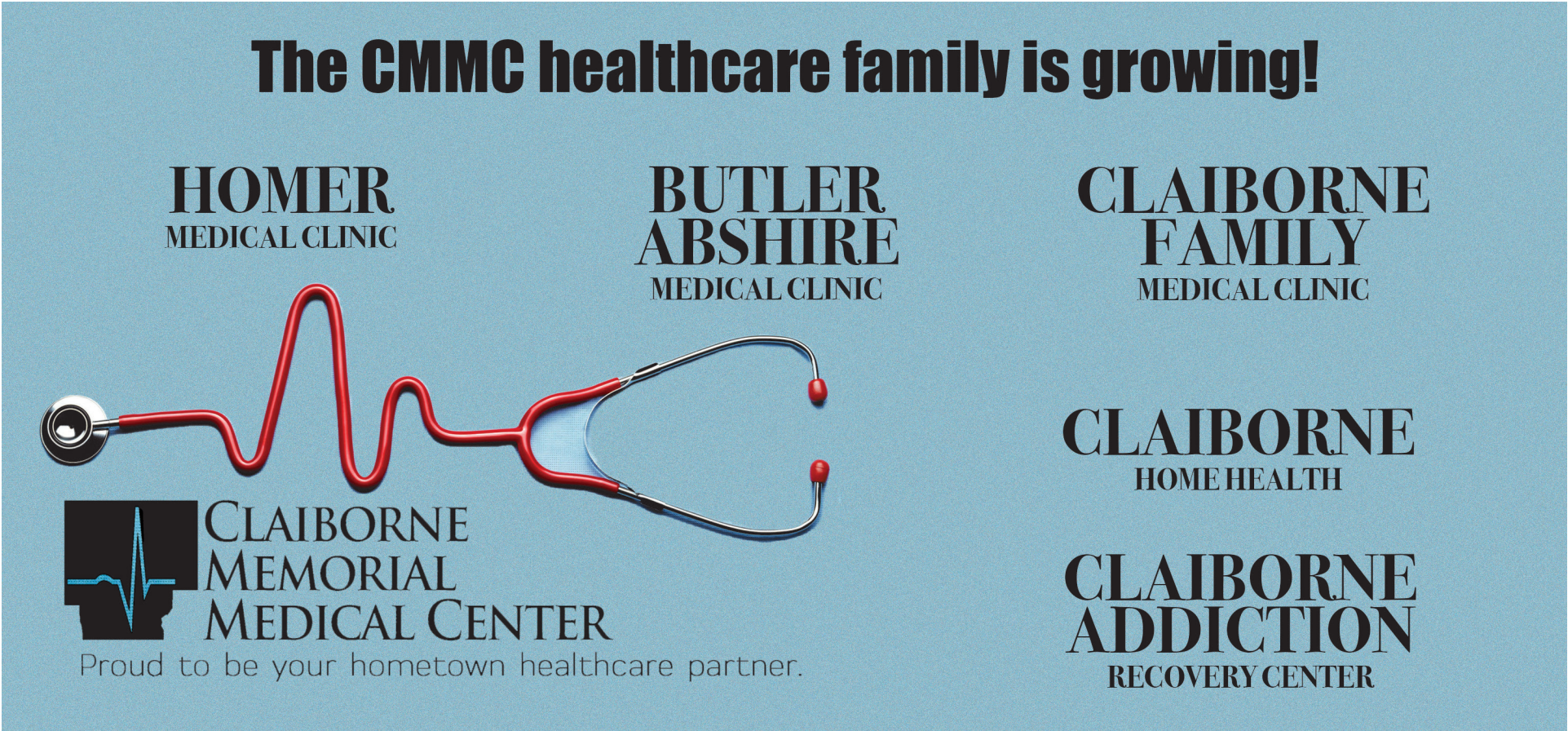


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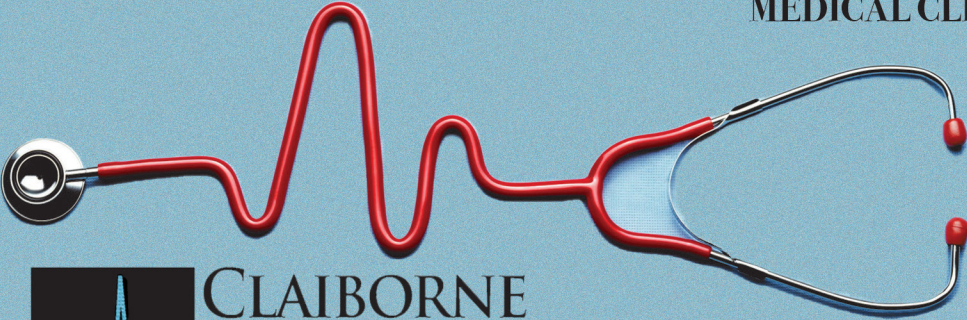


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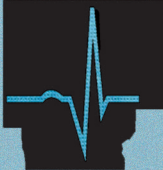
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Minden St. Jude Auction | By Will Phillips Specht Newspapers

raises over \$2 million for children's research hospital

The Minden St. Jude Auction is always a big success, with people donating not only locally but from all over the world. People participate from all 50 states and 49 different countries. The internet alone broke over \$1 million in donations, with the grand total raising \$2,030,013 for the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Besides the main auction there were several events including the Minden St. Jude Chili Cook-off which raised \$9,422, the Young Women's Service Club's Kid Day which raised \$2,220, and the Minden Run for St. Jude which raised a whopping \$89,500. On top of the events, enticing raffle items also pulled in a lot of support.

Some of the big raffle winners include Sara Ryubal winning the Playhouse, three Partner In Hope raffles including Glenn Warren winning the \$5000 cash prize, Allen Wiggins winning a trip to Disney World for four, and Greg Story winning the big screen TV. Joey Elawadi won the Grand Prize of a 2023 GMC Yukon.



The Villas at Spanish Court | By Amber McDown Specht Newspapers

are open for business

The Villas at Spanish Court are finally completed and ready for guests. The Villas, located on Union Street near Minden High, were built around 1931 by F.C. McClanahan.

"According to a news clipping from 1931, they were the most state-of-the-art apartments in the state of Louisiana," said Sara McDaniel, owner of the Villas and Simply Southern Cottage. A former owner had stated that the villas fell into disuse in the 1980s. They had sat vacant until McDaniel breathed new life into these quaint apartments, turning them into stylish short-term rentals with designer decor.

"They all have a name," said McDaniel as she gave the grand tour. "This one is Laura. It was sponsored by Laura Ashley, so that

means that there's Laura Ashley wallpaper, the art, the pillows, the rug, the bedding, the kitchen dishes. All that is sponsored by Laura Ashley. So when a guest looks online, they can choose a villa according to what design aesthetic they want.

"The Annie is sponsored by Annie Selke — I know the core style isn't for everybody, but it's about the experience," said McDaniel.

Some of the units are more calm and neutral like the Piper, which also contains designer rugs from McDaniel's own collection, and some are more beachy and tropical like the Cindy. All of the units have WiFi and access to a patio with a fire pit and string lights.

"I can't decide which one's my favorite," McDaniel said.

Because these buildings had been vacant for about 40 years, a huge amount of work

was required to bring them back to life. "It had asbestos, lead paint, there was a lot of termite damage, so we had to rebuild the studs," said McDaniel. "That's one reason why this is so expensive, because you have to remediate the right way."

Much effort went into saving or replicating the historic architectural features of the buildings such as the fireplaces, cabinets, doors, and mantels. She was able to save the original bathtubs and tilework.

McDaniel is also really excited about her great staff. "We have such an amazing staff," she said. "I got so lucky. I hired a recruiter and did a nation-wide search for an innkeeper/property manager, and I found somebody in Heflin. And she's perfect! The moral of that story is 'look in your own backyard.'"

The Villas at Spanish Court have been featured projects over the past year in both Cottages & Bungalows magazine as well as American Farmhouse Style magazine. In fact, the Piper is showcased on the front cover of the February/March 2023 issue of American Farmhouse Style magazine and "The Laura" is on the cover of the February/March 2023 issue of Cottages and Bungalows.

Bookings recently opened and McDaniel has reservations from North Dakota, Montana, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and even a few staycations from right here in Minden so far.

"I am thrilled and honored to provide a boutique-style short term rental experience in our town," says McDaniel.

To reserve your stay at The Villas at Spanish Court, visit mindenstays.com.

L'Jarius Sneed Day proclaimed in Minden

By Amber McDown
Specht Newspapers

March 4, 2023 was declared L'Jarius Sneed Day in Minden by Mayor Nick Cox. Sneed, a native of Minden and Super Bowl LVII champion, was celebrated with a parade through downtown and then presented with honors including the key to the city. A large crowd came out to show their love and enthusiasm for Sneed, and free food, drinks, and music was provided.

Several people came out to speak about Sneed including State Representative Patrick Jefferson, Superintendent Johnny Rowland, Minden High School Coach Spencer Heard, Louisiana Tech Associate Athletic Director Ed Jackson, Minden Mayor Nick Cox, and Sneed's parents, Jane & Non Sneed.

"Today we are here to salute one of our very own," said State Representative Jefferson, presenting Sneed with an acclamation from Governor John Bel Edwards. "You are an inspiration to throngs of young people who aspire to reach and conquer the grandest of stages," said Jefferson. "Further, you are a welcoming burst of energy, synergy, and excitement for many, as you are Minden High, Louisiana Tech, and now a valued member of the Kansas City Chiefs. Brother Sneed, you will be called many things in your life, and we pray that they all will be good. But after Sunday, February 12, 2023, they must call you Super Bowl Champion!"

After relating stories of watching Sneed play in high school, Superintendent Rowland said, "This guy right here has proven to me that he has got intestinal fortitude, commitment, and a great desire to achieve. Not everybody has it, but that's why he's a Super Bowl champion, and that's why he went to the Chiefs and made his way. And I say congratulations. We're so proud of you."

Coach Heard related a story of a time when Sneed was still in high school, but things weren't going well for him. "Something was going on that day," said Heard. "I just remember looking at him and saying, 'Man, I'll tell you this. Someone might give up on you, but I'm not giving up on you.' Do you remember me telling you that? I didn't give up on you. I'll say this to everyone out here: Don't give up on your kids. Keep believing in your kids. No matter what happens, keep believing. Keep pushing, and keep believing in them. Great things can happen. JJ, you're an example of that."

Coach Heard then announced that Sneed was the recipient of the NFL Way To Play for his tackle on Philadelphia Eagles running back Miles Sanders during the Super Bowl. Receiving



L'Jarius Sneed

this allowed Sneed to pick which high school he wanted to donate the \$5,000 to, and Sneed chose the Minden Crimson Tide.

Next Coach Jackson stepped up to the mic, saying, "It takes a village to raise a kid. We are held responsible whether we want to be or not. We don't choose to be a role model for all these youngsters that are here today, as athletes. We are put into that position because of what we are doing. It's so important that we realize that in our role. Sneed had a lot of people in his life that made an impact and made a difference. I just wanted to come down today and let him know that those guys over there support him, this university supports him, the city of Ruston supports him, and we'll always be there for him."

Jane Sneed began by praising God, before thanking the citizens of Minden for their support.

"First, give honor to God, who is the head of our lives.

Where we are is only because of who God is. I want to thank the supporters of Minden. I thank the community who came out to support my son. Y'all have touched our hearts tremendously. We thank God for the gift. There's no limit to what you can do. Stay focused. Push your children. Pray for your children. There's nothing too hard for God."

Mayor Cox was the next speaker, saying, "One million ninety-three thousand high school kids play football. But we have one who is a Super Bowl champion from Minden, Louisiana!

We call him JJ around here. And to us, he's one in a million. So today I have a proclamation honoring L'Jarius Sneed."

After reading the proclamation, Mayor Cox declared, "I do hereby proclaim that Saturday, March 4, 2023, as a day in which to honor and recognize L'Jarius Sneed and reflect on his many accomplishments which have made a positive impact on this community."

Sneed was then presented with a key to the city.

Sneed addressed the crowd, first thanking the Lord, and then thanking the mayor, the police, and everyone else who made this day possible. He finished by saying, "Thank y'all for coming out here. I love y'all. Thanks for supporting me. I love y'all and this town."

While there were a huge number of people hoping to get autographs, and previously it had been announced that there would be a limited time for that, Sneed told the crowd that he was going to try to see everyone and sign autographs for everyone.

This whole event was put together by Micheal Walker and Randy Tims. Walker and Tims want to express their thankfulness to everyone who contributed to this celebration.



L'Jarius Sneed

Big Plans | By Amber McDown for Miller Quarters Specht Newspapers

Webster Parish Tourism purchased the historic Miller Quarters property in 2022 with the idea of using it as an outdoor gathering space for social events. While some renovations have already been made to it, there are big plans in store for its future.

"We were brainstorming on next steps because we wanted to start applying for some grants," said Serena Gray, executive director for Webster Parish Tourism.

Most of the grants, however, required a design plan with a materials and price list. They realized that they needed to get a design done before they could move forward with any other part of the project.

"Patrick and Rachel Miller have a close connection to the school of design at Lou-

isiana Tech, and they said, 'Why don't we reach out to their students and see if we can make this a class project?' And so, that's exactly what we did."

The professor and the students came out to Miller Quarters and walked the grounds, and heard Tourism's vision for the park. And they did their homework on Minden, learning about things like the old saw mill and the brick streets. They also learned about some of the industry in Minden such as Fibrebond. The students came up with a plan that uses many of these elements: natural woods, steel, and brick.

Now that Tourism has a completed plan, they can start determining the costs and which parts to work on first.

"We haven't discussed it as a group — and us working as a group will make this come together more efficiently — but, in

my opinion, I think the first thing that should be built is probably the amphitheater. Having a covered stage in the downtown area and seating in that park would, I think, help people utilize it for festivals and events. And then next would be the restrooms, because there are no public restrooms downtown outside of facilities that are owned by the city."

The plan includes three walking trails (normal, high-intensity, and connecting paths), a food truck / restroom pavilion located on Gleason Street, a playground with

unique play structures, a double dog park (one section for small dogs and another for large dogs), an amphitheater with bench seating, a zip-line tower (this part would require a person be hired to work the ride), and a BMX bike path.

Everything is still in the initial planning stages, so don't expect to see work beginning soon; however, if you or your company would be interested in sponsoring a section of the park and having your name attached to it, Gray is completely open to the idea.



WPPJ | By Will Phillips awarded 2022 Keep Louisiana Beautiful beautification grant Specht Newspapers

The Webster Parish Police Jury (WPPJ) has been selected as a recipient of the 2022 Keep Louisiana Beautiful beautification grant by Keep Louisiana Beautiful, the state's premier anti-litter and community improvement organization.

This year's grant, in the amount of \$3,630, will provide funding to install a new sign with lighting to direct citizens to the police jury office. Funding will also provide new landscaping that will enhance the beauty of an intersection on Minden's historic Main Street. The landscaping will include native Louisiana plants.

This project will not only revitalize a street corner by removing remnants of

the old bank sign anchor point and electrical boxes, it will also assist citizens in finding the Webster Parish Police Jury office by installing a new sign along the roadway.

"Citizens have a hard time finding the police jury office for permitting and things like when it serves as a voting precinct," said Webster Parish Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness Director Brian Williams, who found and applied for the grant. "I'm excited to be able to help the WPPJ secure funding to install a new sign with landscaping and LED lights, dedicated to Bernard Hudson, to illuminate it at night. This project will not only provide direction for our citizens, but it will also revitalize the old flower bed at the street corner on Main near the courthouse."



Denise Edwards

celebrates 40 years at tax assessor's office

By Will Phillips
Specht Newspapers

The Webster Parish Assessor's office recently hosted a celebration of Denise Edwards and her 40th anniversary working at the assessor's office. She began her career at the age of 16 when she started working in the assessor's office during the summers while working on her accounting degree from Louisiana Tech University. Since then, she has worked under every administration and now leads the office as the Assessor.

It is quite a feat to work at the same place in any career for 40 years. The immense appreciation of Denise and her work was on full display; the office was packed with all manner of community leaders, elected officials, friends, and family, who all came out to share in this special occasion.

Introducing Denise Edwards was Dr. Richard Campbell, who said, "You've heard of the term 'power behind the throne.' We've had a power behind the throne for quite awhile, and now she sits on the throne. We're fortunate to have a person of this ilk be in the position that she's in. I know a number of you are aware of the fact that other assessors and many in the community come to her for the length and depth of her knowledge. She has the appreciation of her fellow office workers and the appreciation of our community."

Afterward, Edwards started to share her experience of working in the assessor's office and how much it has changed throughout the years. "It seems like yesterday I started out in the summers working. Then we had typewriters and calculators. We got the first computer when I went to work at the assessor's office. Of course, then we didn't trust them, so for two years we still typed the rolls and added them with a calculator to make sure the computer wasn't messing us up."

After reminiscing about times past, she started talking about her experience being elected as assessor and all the things she and her office have worked on in order to better help the community that they serve.

"Of course, my greatest honor was being elected as assessor in 2019. I couldn't have done it without my staff. It's not me, it's us. They're my work family and I love all of them so much, and we work as a team and we try to do the best

possible job for our citizens.

"We began by rolling out a public-awareness campaign to let our senior citizens know that they can freeze their assessments. We've done really well with it. We've increased our number of freezes by quite a lot and, during reassessment year, that really helps them because a lot of them are on fixed income, and they were unaware that there was such a program that could help them.

"We also changed our GIS mapping online to a free service where before it was subscription based. We updated our website to make it more user friendly and added a few things. During COVID we added online homestead sign-up, and we actually were able to get some federal funds to help us with that.

"We began doing an annual report starting two years ago, and we've just tried to keep our public informed of all our changes — how the process works, how millages are set — and let them know how everything goes, and we plan to continue that.

"We've also added an audit program to our homestead to let us know people who aren't eligible ... but also people who are eligible that may not know, then they get a notice. "We've digitized all of the old maps, and we're working on digitizing all of our old files. We've lowered the millage rate of the assessment district my first two years in office and saved the taxpayers one million dollars and we plan to keep it low again this year as well saving another \$500,000," said Edwards.

After speaking about all the accomplishments of her office, she announced her plans to seek re-election this coming fall and the future plans in store for the assessor's office, such as digitizing old maps and records, updating their online GIS maps, as well as continuing the work they've been doing to make things as easy for local citizens as possible. "I also want this to be a time for me to announce that I do plan to seek re-election in the fall, and I hope that I'll have all of your love and support that we received the prior time. It means so much to me."



Denise Edwards





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