Residential building permits may set record

West Baton Rouge is on target to break its record of residential construction permits issued by the end of 2013, said Parish President Riley “PeeWee” Berthelot.

The year after Hurricane Katrina, in 2006, the parish issued 220 single family residential building permits. That reflects the most permits issued since the parish has been compiling records of numbers of permits. Since 2006, the number of permits has fluctuated annually from about 133 to 166.

But the parish is outpacing those numbers in 2013. As of September, the parish has issued 179 permits for the year 2013, or about 20 permits per month. If the parish issues 20 permits per month for October through December, then the total issued for 2013 would be 239, significantly above the record of 220 permits in 2006.

Most of the permits issued this year are for the southern end of the parish – in Brusly and Addis, according to Kevin Durbin, director of the WBR Office of Community Planning and Development. In fact, a total of 73 of the permits issued by August were in Addis. Most of the other permits issued are from the unincorporated areas of the parish, especially the Erwinville area or so-called “north end.”

“We know that like the economy, building construction has cycles and the Baton Rouge region has done well economically in the past year or so, and I believe that is reflecting in our permit numbers,” Durbin said. The parish is also benefiting from a good school system and growth in the Westbank industrial corridor.

Berthelot said the growth will help the parish attract more retail businesses. “Retail is all about having enough roof tops, and this growth helps us sell West Baton Rouge to retail companies,” he said.
Feast on the Levee set Oct. 27

The 33rd annual Feast on the Levee, sponsored by St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Brusly, is set for Sunday, October 27 from 11 a.m. until 7 p.m. on the church grounds, 462 S. Kirkland Drive. This family event featuring food, fun and entertainment includes a Cajun food fest, cake baking contest, sweet shop, silent auctions, raffles and Games2U for the kids! Live music is provided by Penalty Box from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and The Issue from 3:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. For more information contact the St. John the Baptist Catholic Church Office at 225-749-2189.

West Baton Rouge Library

WBR Library offers new books!

West Baton Rouge Parish Library offers many types of services, from computer classes to children’s programs to e-books to Internet access. But what about books – regular old paper-and-ink, touchy-feely books? We absolutely have them – books are the library’s mainstay, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Here are just a few new ones that are waiting for you! The Mayan Secrets by Clive Cussler will keep you reading all night! When Sam and Remi find a skeleton clutching a clay pot, they uncover secrets so powerful that nothing is more important and everything is at risk.

Are you a “Duck Dynasty” fan? Followers will enjoy Happy, Happy, Happy by Phil Robertson, the patriarch of the family of television fame. From humble beginnings in north Louisiana to the building of the family business into an impressive empire, this autobiography will amaze you! Sheryl Sandberg offers Lean In. This book urges women to take risks, seek new challenges, find work that they love, and remain passionately engaged with it. Sandberg knows what she’s talking about – she is the Chief Operating Officer for Face Book, and ranked 8th on Fortune’s list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business.

Beloved writer Maeve Binchy has penned A Week in Winter set on the coast of Ireland. When Chicky decides to renovate a decaying mansion into a holiday retreat, the whole town thinks she’s crazy. Stop at the library and check out these titles and more. Curl up with a good old-fashioned book and enjoy!

About this Publication:

is published quarterly as a cooperative endeavor of West Baton Rouge Parish government agencies to educate residents about projects, activities and services in the parish. It is produced by Peacock Communications, LLC. Comments can be sent to: ellie@peacockcommunications.com, or call 225-929-9661.
West Baton Rouge Parish Government

Parish 2014 budget includes biking, road projects

Projects to improve Rosedale Road in Port Allen and add a levee top walking/ biking trail in Brusly are included in the parish’s 2014 budget, and will get underway by next summer. The parish has received a grant from the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development to make Rosedale Road safer by closing in ditches on the side of the road and adding culverts and sidewalks.

The $650,000 project calls for about 1.5 miles of culverts and sidewalks to be added from La. Hwy. 1 to three Canal Bridge. “A lot of people walk on that road and it is a dangerous situation because of the deep ditches next to the road and rate of speed of vehicles on the road,” noted Parish President Riley “PeeWee” Berthelot. He said eventually the sidewalks will be tied into the city’s levee top trail system.

The parish has also received grants totaling $707,000, and the parish will fund an additional $240,000 for a trail head and walking/biking trail on the levee around Main Street in Brusly. The exact location of the trail head is still being established. The trail will extend to both the north and south of the trail head, with the eventual goal of having the trail extend to the Intracoastal Bridge. Construction on the project is expected to being next summer.

The parish has also set aside $50,000 for the continuation of the Port Allen levee trail, with the eventual goal of extending that trail to the old Mississippi River Bridge.

Berthelot pushes for action, La. 1 traffic back-ups

Parish President Riley “PeeWee” Berthelot said the parish is working on both short and long term solutions to the La. Hwy. 1 traffic backups at the Intracoastal Waterway Bridge.

The short-term solution is the La. Hwy. 1/La. 415 connector, and the long-term solution is another bridge across the Mississippi River, he said. “We recognize that the La. Hwy. 1/La. 415 connector road will not solve all the problems, that we still need another bridge,” Berthelot said. “But another bridge will take years to get off the ground and more than $600 million to build. We have been working for some time to educate our state and federal officials about the severe traffic back-ups and the need to get both short and long term solutions moving forward.”

In July, the parish presented its case to the Louisiana Department of Transportation for funding from its special Mega-Project fund. Berthelot said the parish received much praise for its presentation, and the state has since asked for additional information, but the parish has not received further word on it yet.

The parish video used in its presentation for the La. 1/La. 415 connector route can be viewed on the parish website: www.wbrcouncil.org.

Berthelot said he also had the opportunity to meet with Gov. Bobby Jindal after The Dow Chemical Co. press conference to announce its $1 billion expansion of the deep ditches next to the road and it is a dangerous situation because of the...
Additions to tax rolls, increased values for 2013

Parish property owners will be pleased to know “there are no surprises” in their 2013 property tax bills.

Assessor Barney “Frog” Altazan says property tax notices should be mailed out by the end of October allowing approximately a two month window of time to meet the payment deadline. “The good news is property tax amounts should be the same as last year since 2013 was not a re-valuation year and there were no millage (rate) increases by any of the taxing jurisdictions,” Assessor Altazan said.

There were approximately 385 residential and commercial improvements and additions added to the assessment roll in 2013. These additions to the roll increased real estate assessed values by $5.3 million or an increase of 3.6% for the year. There were 6,130 residential properties with homestead exemptions, an increase of 127 homestead exemptions or an increase of 2.1% for the year.

“The long established trend of businesses being the top taxpayers in the parish continued in 2013 with the top ten taxpayers in the parish accounting for roughly 50% of all property taxes to be paid,” Assessor Altazan noted.

The top ten taxpayers for 2013 listed in order of taxes to be paid are: The Dow Chemical Company, ExxonMobil Corporation, Placid Refining Company, Shintech Louisiana, BP Lubricants USA, M/G Transport Services LLC, Enterprise Products Partners LP, Entergy Gulf States Inc., Union Pacific Railroad and Criterion Catalysts and Technologies.

Business personal property (movable property) assessed values increased by $12.4 million in 2013, an increase of 5.7% when compared to the previous year. Altazan says for the 2013 year, businesses will pay 83.5% of all property taxes to be collected in West Baton Rouge Parish.

Additionally Altazan notes, “the parish is extremely fortunate to have over $1 billion dollars in Louisiana Economic Development industrial exemption contracts on the books that, as they expire over the next ten years, will be a significant boost to the tax base in West Baton Rouge.”

The only area of assessment that was down in 2013 was Public Service (utility) assessments that are determined by the Louisiana Tax Commission and provided directly to the West Baton Rouge Parish Assessor’s Office. Public Service assessments were down $21.1 million or 35.5% when compared to 2012, the decrease due entirely to a large barge fleet being relocated out of West Baton Rouge Parish.

“Even with losing the $21 million barge fleet assessment, which we were expecting, we were only down about 1% for 2013. I like to focus on the $17.7 million of growth we had in other areas, still a great year for West Baton Rouge Parish,” he said.

For more information about assessments, Altazan encourages property owners to contact his office at 225-344-6777 or visit the Assessor’s Office website at www.wbrasessor.org.
New principals bring expertise to schools

Three West Baton Rouge Parish schools have new leadership, offering fresh ideas and direction to students.

“We are fortunate to have these highly qualified individuals guiding our young people,” says Superintendent David Corona. “Each has demonstrated outstanding abilities over the course of their careers.”

James Jackson assumed the top position at Port Allen High School after serving the previous year as principal at Devall Middle School. He earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Louisiana State University and earned a master’s degree of Education in Administration and Supervision from Southern University.

A New Orleans native, Jackson taught for three years in East Baton Rouge Parish at North Highland Elementary School and for three years at Southern University Laboratory School. He also served as assistant principal at Brusly Middle School for two years.

Port Allen Middle School’s new acting principal, John Arrasmith, is in his eleventh year at the school. He began as a 6th/7th grade English teacher before becoming a reading coach/literacy facilitator in 2006. In 2010, he became assistant principal and held that position until his recent appointment.

After receiving a bachelor’s degree in English Literature from LSU, he earned a master’s degree in Educational Leadership from Grand Canyon University in 2010.

Larree Taylor is new to West Baton Rouge schools, having worked with the Department of Education as a Scope and Sequence writer and as a trainer for the Teacher Leader’s Network. She is now principal of Duvall Middle School, serves on the advisory board for the LSU Writing Project and is a Common Core Workshop presenter.

She is a graduate of LSU with a bachelor’s degree in Speech Communication and a master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction, with emphasis on literacy.

Grant helps students get robotic training

ExxonMobil has awarded a $2,500 grant to aid Port Allen High School students with hands-on learning opportunities in technology.

“This will help meet the needs of building and adding robotics modules for our students,” said Associate Superintendent for Instruction Sharon Lair. “We’re very pleased with the support from ExxonMobil each year. It has helped tremendously in furthering STEM (or Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education in our schools.”

Last year, ExxonMobil provided funds for Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG) program, a job-to-work transition program. The grant awarded earlier this spring will be used on Project ROBOTEK by the high school’s 12-member Robotics Team. The objective of Project ROBOTEK is to “increase students’ knowledge of STEM related careers and applications by providing meaningful, hands-on learning opportunities using robotics programming as a medium,” according to the proposal submitted for the grant.

Students are chosen to participate on the Robotics Team based on their interest, and have opportunities to plan, design, build and program robots. They also participate in local robotics workshops and local and regional robotics competitions.

Lair says she hopes the funding will allow the team to grow and provide for replacement parts kits, as well as pay for training workshops and competition fees.

2 teachers, counselor recognized for achievements

Two West Baton Rouge Parish teachers and a counselor are getting high marks for excelling in their fields.

Science teachers Mandy Ford of Brusly High School and Rhonda Matthew of Port Allen High School have been selected to participate in the New Science Teacher Academy (NSTA), co-sponsored by Dow. In addition, Counselor Candace Lair, a six-year counselor at Brusly Middle School, recently became a National Certified School Counselor.

“The professional development on behalf of these individuals not only speaks well of them, but benefits our schools and students as well,” says Associate Superintendent for Instruction Sharon Lair.

Ford and Mathew are among middle and high school teachers who have been elected to the NSTA for a year-long professional development and mentoring program. Lair noted that NSTA participants rarely come from Louisiana, so the fact that West Baton Rouge Parish Schools has two recipients is impressive.

“Our teachers are excited about this wonderful opportunity,” she says. During the NSTA Academy, Ford and Matthew will attend an all-expense-paid trip to the NSTA National Conference on Science Education in Boston next spring. Among other benefits, they will have access to web-based curriculum, professional development web seminars and mentoring services.

Candace Lair is also a National Certified Counselor and a Licensed Professional Counselor. Sharon Lair, who is Candace’s mother, notes that the additional certification and professional development equates to performance and is particularly beneficial in unexpected crisis situations.
Mayor lists priorities for city

Mayor Deedy Slaughter said she is focusing her efforts on four areas for the City of Port Allen—enhancing public safety, community development, implementation of the city’s master plan, and infrastructure projects.

Slaughter said a new rescue vehicle was purchased by the West Baton Rouge Fire Sub-district #3 for the Port Allen Fire Department at a cost of $305,000. City officials make up the board for the sub-district. The rescue truck carries service equipment, technical rescue equipment and mobile air/cascade capability.

Slaughter said she has included $200,000 in the 2013-2014 budget proposal to lease/purchase a new fleet of police cars and related equipment to replace outdated vehicles.

The mayor said the city is working on grants and other funding to further develop the downtown and river front areas of the city in hopes that this development will bring new businesses to the city such as new restaurants.

Infrastructure projects include continuing to improve roads, drainage, the addition of sidewalks and paving more of the levee top for walking and biking.

The city has also received a $25,000 grant to purchase new natural gas meters in an area west of La. Hwy. 1 and east of Melissa Avenue. The grant was provided through the Gas Meter Replacement Safety Program.

Neighborhood Watch meets monthly

Concerned Citizens of Port Allen are holding monthly Neighborhood Watch meetings monthly. The next meeting is October 28 at 6 p.m. on the third floor of Port Allen City Hall. The meetings focus on tips for residents to keep their homes and property safe, how to be more observant about their neighborhood and surroundings, and other neighborhood safety topics. The public is invited to these meetings.

BRCC Westside campus opening celebrated

A crowd of more than 100 people welcomed the opening of the new Baton Rouge Community College Westside campus in Plaquemine during its ribbon-cutting on September 19. The festive atmosphere was due to the new opportunities that the facility brings for area residents to get the training needed to land high-paying jobs.

The 15,547 square feet facility at 25250 Tenant Road behind Plaquemine High School (PHS) now offers a new industrial maintenance program, which provides certifications in crafts sought after by the chemical industry—electrical, instrumentation, millwright, pipefitting and welding. Students completing the certifications will be able to start at jobs making $25 per hour plus benefits. LPN, medical assistant and certified nursing assistant courses are also offered at the campus.

The facility has a value of some $5 million, with the state providing $3 million and The Dow Chemical Co. donating $1 million to construction. Former Senator Robert Marionneaux and State Rep. Karen St. Germain were instrumental in obtaining state funding for the new facility.

The Iberville School Board donated the land for the facility, Iberville Parish government provided the sewer and water infrastructure and a bridge between Plaquemine High School and the new campus to encourage dual-enrollment classes for PHS students. In addition, Dow has donated some $500,000 in equipment for the industrial maintenance program.

Dow Louisiana Operations Site Director Eduardo Do Val noted that Dow just announced a $1 billion expansion of its Plaquemine site, and it is exciting that Dow also has played a role in making sure local people would have a tremendous opportunity to get the education to work for Dow or with any of the chemical companies along the river.

“When we (Dow) announced our 1.06 billion expansion, we also made a commitment to growing our workforce in Plaquemine,” Do Val said. “Our investment in BRCC is a great way to offer local people the training required to assume manufacturing and engineering jobs right here at Louisiana Operations.”

Steven Toups, representing Dr. Joe May, president of the Community College system, noted, “Now there shouldn’t be a kid in the community that wants a job that can’t get one.”

CELEBRATING OPENING... Shown at the BRCC Westside campus ribbon cutting are, from left, Iberville Parish President J. Mitchell Ourso, Jr., Parish Council Member Henry “Buckett” Scott, School Board Member Yolanda Laws, School Superintendent P. Edward Cancienne, Jr., Steve Smith of LCTCS Facilities Corp and Board of Supervisors; Steven Toups, BRCC Chancellor Dr. Andrea Miller, Dean Dr. Kay McDaniel, Dow Louisiana Operations Leader Eduardo do Val, La. Workforce Commission Executive Director Curt Eysink, White Castle Alderwoman Barbara O’Bear, and Parish Council Member Edwin Reeves.
Assistant Fire Chief Hunts elected president of state firefighters association

Assistant Fire Chief Kenny Hunts was elected and installed as president of the Louisiana State Firefighters Association (LSFA), a 13,000-member fire service organization.

He was installed in August and will serve until August of 2014. “I am really passionate about LSFA because about 75 percent of firefighters in Louisiana are still volunteers,” Hunts said. “Our organization speaks for those volunteers.”

The LSFA provides a variety of benefits for firefighters, such as a death benefit if a firefighter is killed in the line of duty, a variety of insurance, discounts on services and at retail stores, assistance grants for volunteers who are in college, and classes and conferences.

Hunts was first elected to the LSFA board as District 6 representative in 2005. District 6 includes the Baton Rouge region. He was elected second vice president in 2011, and served as first vice president in 2012. He also received the prestigious Roy A Robichaux Sr. Legislative Memorial Award in 2012 for his work with legislators on behalf of firefighters.

Hunts said he has visited about 40 percent of fire departments statewide since he has been on the Executive Board, and is also Commander of the LSFA Honor Guard, which attends the funerals of firefighters killed in the line of duty. “We have not had a firefighter killed in duty in two years, but it is an honor for me to assist the families with resources provided by LSFA when that is necessary,” he said.

Hunts has been a firefighter with the Brusly Fire Department since 1991. He started as a volunteer, became a part-time paid firefighter in 1999, and became a full-time paid firefighter in 2002, and was quickly appointed assistant chief under Chief Mike Alleman. “This is a rewarding career,” he said. “I have saved people’s lives three times, and gotten families and children out of burning houses. That is the greatest feeling in the world.”

Hunts praised the Brusly Fire Department and its staff, noting, “We have a great team, an excellent fire prevention program, and we do it on a very tight budget.”

To the Citizens of Addis:

It is truly an honor to serve you as Mayor of Addis. The first eight months have come and gone and the staff, Council and I have been busy.

Allow me to share some of the accomplishments:

- Completion of widening and paving of Peter Messina Road, as well as repair of pot holes throughout town.
- Addressing drainage projects along First Street and continuing other drainage projects using grant money previously awarded. Other drainage maintenance projects have been identified and completed.
- Meetings with railroad representatives concerning rail traffic and the conditions of the crossings.
- Meetings with the Louisiana Department of Transportation concerning all traffic signals in the Town of Addis. We will continue to work on the signals to provide a better flow of traffic entering or crossing LA 1.
- The connector road between Sugar Mill Plantation and Lukeville Lane has been completed.
- We have new businesses, including Dollar General Store and Fit Blendz (located in Benedetto’s Shopping Center), and it appears we will have a new day care center in Addis.
- We are happy to announce the launch of the new Town of Addis website, www.addisla.org, replacing the site that was launched in 1997. Our goal for the website is to help promote the Town of Addis and to provide information about the Town of Addis and its history. Also, we want to provide important phone numbers and links to other sites of interest of our local area. We hope you visit our website soon and share it with your friends and relatives.

I would like to share some common citizen complaints, including numerous complaints about pets running through the neighborhoods and dangerous animals. The Town of Addis has ordinances concerning these two matters:

Sec. 4-3. - Running at large. No owner shall allow his animal, whether domesticated or undomesticated, or fowl to roam, run or be at large upon any public property or the private property of another.

Sec. 4-6. - Keeping dangerous animals prohibited: exception. No dangerous animal as defined by this article in section 4-1 above shall be allowed within the Town of Addis unless a special permit pursuant to section 4-7 is first obtained from the Town of Addis.

Please follow all Town ordinances. If you have any questions, please contact the Town Hall.

In closing, please visit the website, www.addisla.org, to get contact information for your Town of Addis officials:

- Mayor Pro-tempore: Rusty Parrish
- Councilperson: Wilson “Hook” Cazes
- Councilperson: Lance “Yogi” Gauthreaux
- Councilperson: Tate Acosta
- Councilperson: Rhonda Leblanc Kelley
- Mayor Pro-tempore: Kenny Hunts

Kindest Regards,
David H. Toups, Mayor
Recently the WBR Chamber held ribbon cuttings to welcome these new businesses:

$150 million in upgrades to grain facility at Port celebrated

A $150 million upgrade to the Louis Dreyfus Commodities grain facility at the Port of Greater Baton Rouge provides 37 new direct jobs and will allow the elevator to handle up to 5 million metric tons of grains and oilseeds annually.

“The Dreyfus Commodities flagship export elevator at the Port will be the most modern grain elevator on the Mississippi River,” said Jay Hardman, Executive Director of the Port of Greater Baton Rouge. “This facility will provide Louisiana farmers with more access to international markets for their agricultural products, and it signals a new stage in the growth and development of the port.”

The 37 new jobs will have an average annual salary of $65,000, plus benefits. The expansion is projected to create another 32 indirect jobs. Louis-Dreyfus already had 23 employees at the port and the project generated 100 construction jobs.

Ciro Echesortu, the CEO of Louis-Dreyfus Commodities, said, “This facility is essential to our global operations utilizing capacity to handle continuing growth of demand for exports outside the U.S. That growth in demand will help local farmers.” Echesortu said half of the soybeans and cargo that will be loaded onto ships will come from farmers within a 60-mile radius.

Chamber Ambassadors spotlighted

Welcome to the Parish

Recently the WBR Chamber held ribbon cuttings to welcome these new businesses:

Dow announces $1 billion investment in local site

Dow Louisiana Operations Site Leader Eduardo Do Val announced the Dow Chemical Company will invest $1.06 billion in a pair of new polyolefins plants – one for producing next-generation synthetic rubber and another for high-performance polyethylene – and capital upgrades to its ethylene capacity at the company’s 3,300-acre site in Plaquemine.

The project will retain 1,380 existing workers employed directly by Dow and create 71 new direct jobs with an average annual salary of more than $49,000 per year, plus benefits. This project should result in an additional 470 indirect jobs.

The Dow project will create 1,200 construction jobs as well as 150 contractor jobs to support the new facilities. Dow will begin construction on the ethylene efficiency project almost immediately with the building of the new polyolefins plants – one in Iberville Parish and one in West Baton Rouge Parish – to begin by the end of 2013. Dow projects a completion date for the projects near the end of 2016, with the bulk of the 71 new direct jobs being filled in 2015.

“The great people of Dow Louisiana Operations deserve this win,” said Eduardo Do Val, Dow Louisiana Operations site director. “They have run this site safely and reliably for many years.”

Chamber recognizes outstanding high school seniors

From Left: School Sponsor, DLFCU’s Tammy Copeland and Latasha Johnson with Brusly High School Seniors Beatriz Garcia and Emily Palermo and DLFCU’s Blaine Rabalais.

UPCOMING CHAMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

October Meeting

Jay Hardman
Executive Director
Port of Greater Baton Rouge

Wednesday, October 30th
Louisiana Bayou Bistro
441 S Vaughan St., Brusly
11:30AM: Registration/Networking
12 Noon: Program begins
$20 Chamber Members/
$25 Non-Chamber Members

November Meeting

David Corona
WBR School Superintendent
State of the Parish on Education

Wednesday, November 20th
Addis Community Center
11:30AM: Registration/Networking
12 Noon: Program begins
$20 Chamber Members/
$25 Non-Chamber Members