

SPRING 2019

# GATOR GRAM

LAKE CHARLES/SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

LAKE CHARLES · SULPHUR · WESTLAKE · DEQUINCY · VINTON · IOWA



USA Boxing, the national governing body for Olympic-style amateur boxing, chose Lake Charles to host the 2020 Olympic Trials in Boxing and National Championships, December 7-15, 2019, at the Lake Charles Civic Center, 900 Lakeshore Drive. The event will feature both male and female elite and youth boxers from across the United States.

Last year, Eric Zartler, sales director at the Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau (LC/SWLA CVB) made a presentation to the USA Boxing Board of Directors in Salt Lake City on behalf of the LC/SWLA CVB, the Lake Charles Civic Center and local event partners. There were multiple destinations bidding to host this prestigious tournament.

“USA Boxing is tremendously excited to join with Lake Charles to bring the Olympic Trials to the Gulf Coast. The city’s warm hospitality and Southern charm, great people, climate and culture make for a perfect fit to crown our next generation of champions and give our coaches, boxers and officials a special experience,” said Michael Campbell, manager of operations and events.

“We are truly excited about this historic opportunity, the largest single sporting event in Lake Charles’ history. The LC/SWLA CVB is to be commended for their tireless efforts to put our area on the map as the destination for events of this stature. This is further evidence of great things happening in Lake Charles. This will be greatly beneficial for local businesses as well. We look forward to rolling out the red carpet and showcasing our great city to competitors and others with USA Boxing,” said Mayor Nic Hunter of the City of Lake Charles.

“We are proud to be chosen as the host for the 2020 Olympic Trials in Boxing and National Championships this coming December. This event is the largest-ever sports group to visit Lake Charles, bringing over 6,500 total room nights in the span of two weeks during a slower travel period. 2019 will also be the 25th anniversary celebration of the 1984 USA Boxing Olympic Team, who made history on the Olympic stage, winning a total of 11 medals. We are looking forward to working with the entire hospitality community in the Lake Area to treat USA Boxing to Southern Hospitality – Southwest Louisiana style,” said Zartler.

The event is projected to attract more than 800 boxers and generate more than 6,500 total overnight stays, with the estimated economic impact anticipated to be over 2 million dollars. The tournament begins with weigh-ins and technical meetings. Boxing matches will be held December 10-15, with the majority of the events taking place inside the Sudduth Coliseum and the Olympic Trial championship matches being held at the Rosa Hart Theatre to determine which boxers will represent the USA in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The anniversary of the 1984 USA Boxing Olympic Team will bring star power to the Lake Area with possible visits by Tyrell Biggs, Pernell “Sweet Pea” Whittaker and Evander Holyfield, just to name a few.

Updated information will be available throughout the year. For the latest, visit [www.visitlakecharles.org/USABoxing](http://www.visitlakecharles.org/USABoxing) or learn more at [www.teamusa.org/USA-Boxing](http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Boxing).



[www.VisitLakeCharles.org](http://www.VisitLakeCharles.org) #VisitLakeCharles

/LakeCharlesCVB @lakecharlescvb VisitLakeCharles @visitlakecharles





## A message from our executive director

With incredible visitor growth in the destination over the past 5 years, Southwest Louisiana is continuing to see an increase in creative endeavors across all sectors. From new restaurants, shops and festivals to partnerships that give rise to new attractions and experiences benefitting visitors and locals alike, Southwest Louisiana is simmering with promise and synergy. The bureau is poised to amplify the message of the diverse offerings of Calcasieu Parish in addition to promoting the South's Premier Gaming Resort Destination, the natural wonders of the Creole Nature Trail All-American Road, and Southwest Louisiana as a popular destination for youth sports.

Images are powerful sources of inspiration, and the CVB is working toward a complete visual library of every visitor-friendly location including attractions, shops, restaurants, meeting venues and accommodations by partnering with Threshold 360. With dynamic images of the destination, the bureau can enhance its website, blog and social presence, as well as build virtual itineraries and have more visual representation online, accessible by Google and other search engines. This partnership, coupled with the Louisiana Google Partnership, will be highly advantageous for the destination.

To entice meetings and conventions, the sales team will embark upon promoting an incentive program to bolster growth and the attractiveness of Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana as a meeting destination. The incentive concentrates on shoulder seasons for the area and will give Southwest Louisiana an advantage whenever competing with similar destinations that have essentially the same capacity to host meetings and conventions.

This year, we are looking forward to hosting the LHSAA Marsh Madness Boys' Basketball State Championships, softball and baseball tournaments throughout the year, as well as the 2020 Olympic Trials in Boxing and National Championships to close out 2019. In addition, we'll host the Traveler's Protective Assoc. National Conference, the Louisiana Rural Water Assoc., Louisiana DARE Officers Assoc. and Louisiana Head Start this summer and a myriad of travel media trips including the culinary media tour which will be held simultaneously with the Southern Cast Iron Cookoff event this fall.

The bureau will continue to invest in community partnerships as well as strategically beneficial partnerships with Brand USA for international promotions, the Louisiana Office of Tourism, the Louisiana Travel Association, and others as to light the way for a stronger and brighter future. The staff at the bureau is eager to begin working to bring new business, events and media coverage to Southwest Louisiana.

Shelley Johnson, CDME, LCTP | Executive Director, CEO

## Volunteer Opportunities for Athletic Events



The Louisiana High School Athletic Association (LHSAA) Boys' Basketball Marsh Madness State Championship Tournament will be held March 4-9 at Burton Complex. The CVB works diligently with the staff at Burton and the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury to help make this event incredibly memorable for the teams and fans. In addition to assisting during the tournament, there are also volunteers who are team hosts, being a local point of contact for the teams, assisting them with their needs. Fans pour in from across the state to witness this event, and it's rewarding for everyone involved.

Moving into April, the LHSAA Softball State Championship Tournament will be held April 26-27 at Frasch Park in Sulphur, followed by the LHSAA Baseball State Championship Tournament from May 8-11 at McMurry Park, also in Sulphur. For more information or to volunteer for the first LHSAA tournament in the lineup, go to [www.visitlakecharles.org/volunteer](http://www.visitlakecharles.org/volunteer).

## THE BUREAU STAFF

### Shelley Johnson, CDME, LCTP

Executive Director, CEO

### Kyle Edmiston, CDME

Deputy Director, COO

### ADMINISTRATION

Shanna Landry

Director of Administration & Satellite Office

Heather Savoie

Accounting/HR Director

Alecia Acosta

Finance/Administration Assistant

Cindy Johnson

Special Projects/Film Location Manager

### SALES & SERVICES

Eric Zartler, TMP

Sales Director

Taylor Beard Stanley

Senior Sales Manager

Tara Johnson

Sales Manager

Jamey Kadhim

Group Services Coordinator

Emilee Hoenes

Sales Coordinator - Sports

### COMMUNICATIONS

Angie Manning, CDME

Communications Director

Colten Miller

Publications/Systems Manager

Amos Orr

Digital Marketing Strategy Manager

Will Precht

Senior Media/Public Relations Manager

Kelli Fontenot

Media/Public Relations Manager

### TOURISM

Anne Taber Klenke

Tourism Director

Kaitlyn Gallegos

Sales Manager - Tour & Travel

### VISITOR INFORMATION

Melissa Trahan

Tourist Information Manager

Kristen Shiver

Tourist Information Weekend Manager

Melanie Stahl

Tourist Information Assistant

Will Nidecker

Adventure Point Guide/Project Manager

Angela Hammond

Tourist Information Assistant/Adventure Guide

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Oliver G. "Rick" Richard, III, Chairman

Arts & Humanities of Southwest Louisiana

Evette Gradney, Vice Chairman

Southwest Louisiana Lodging Association

Jonathan Ringo, Secretary/Treasurer

Calcasieu Parish Police Jury

Lauren Cooper

West Calcasieu Community Center Authority

Edwina Medearis

City of Lake Charles

Mark Lavergne

Southwest Louisiana Festivals

Rob King

Southwest Louisiana Restaurant Association

Nimesh "Nick" Zaver

City of Sulphur

Alan Trantina

Southwest Louisiana Lodging Association

Willie Mount

Chamber Southwest

Kane Mitchell

West Calcasieu Association of Commerce

# BUREAU UPDATES



**OLIVER G. "RICK" RICHARD, III**  
Chairman



**EVETTE GRADNEY**  
Vice Chairman



**JONATHAN RINGO**  
Secretary/Treasurer

## Bureau Board of Directors

The CVB is governed by an 11-member board of directors, and 2019 brings with it a new slate of officers for the executive committee. Oliver G. "Rick" Richard III, representing the Arts & Humanities of Southwest Louisiana, is the chairman of the board with Evette Gradney, representing the Southwest Louisiana Lodging Association, serving as the vice-chairman, and Jonathan Ringo, appointed by the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, is the secretary/treasurer.

Additionally, Willie Mount, representing the Chamber Southwest, and Kane Mitchell, serving on behalf of the West Calcasieu Chamber of Commerce, were recently selected to serve on the board of directors for the Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau (LC/SWLA CVB).

Mount is a graduate of Lake Charles High School and McNeese State University, where she earned a bachelor of science in business administration. In 2016, she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters by McNeese State University. In 1993, Mount was elected as the first female mayor of Lake Charles. After serving over six years as mayor, she became the first woman elected as a Louisiana State Senator from District 27 in 1999. She served three terms in the Louisiana Senate, where she held a variety of leadership roles, including chairman of the Health and Welfare Committee, chairman

of the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Committee and vice-chair of the Education Committee. Mount was also the first female to be elected as president of the Boy Scouts of America - Calcasieu Area Council.

With more than 32 years of experience in banking, Mitchell is currently the vice president and branch manager of Pedestal Bank. Mitchell graduated from Lake Charles High School in 1973 and continued his education at McNeese State University, earning a degree in business administration. He continued his education at Louisiana State University where he received his master's degree in business administration. He has also been an active member of the Sulphur Rotary Club since 1993.

"Willie and Kane have longstanding and extensive backgrounds in community involvement and are committed to seeing Southwest Louisiana thrive. The CVB staff and board are eager to work with each of them to further our mission, vision, and goals. Southwest Louisiana has an incredible breadth of offerings for the leisure or business traveler and by working with the strengths of our two new board members to enhance programming and discover new opportunities, we can achieve optimal results," said Kyle Edmiston, chief operating officer at the CVB.

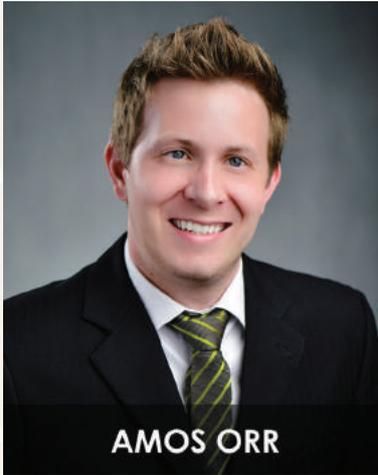


Sam Wilkinson is the outgoing chairman of the board who served on the board for six years.



Brian Levens is an outgoing board member who served on the board for six years.

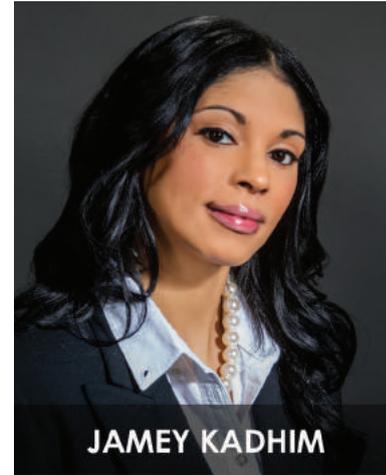
# BUREAU UPDATES



AMOS ORR

## **Amos Orr, Digital Media Strategy Manager**

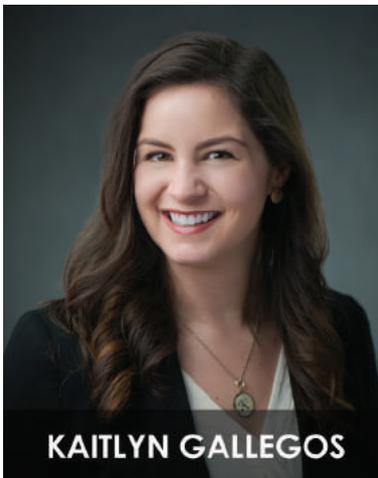
The bureau is pleased to announce that Amos Orr is the new Digital Media Strategy Manager, as well as a returning, seasoned CVB employee. He has 7 years of experience in the tourism/hospitality industry and spent that last three years with New Orleans & Company. He brings a great understanding of the bureau's digital role for tourism marketing.



JAMEY KADHIM

## **Promotion: Jamey Kadhim, Group Services Coordinator**

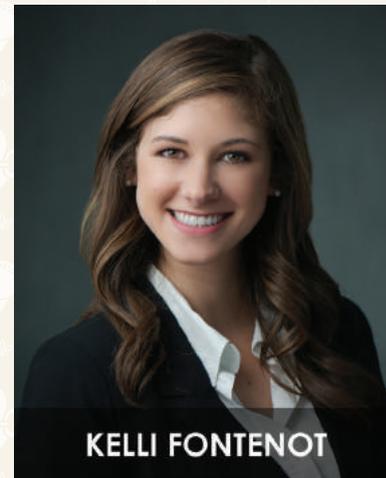
Jamey Kadhim has been promoted to Group Services Coordinator. Her responsibilities include providing welcome bags and name tags for groups, organizing bookings for Gumbaux Gator and managing complimentary services for conventions, meetings and tour groups. Jamey previously held the role of Tourist Information Weekend Manager.



KAITLYN GALLEGOS

## **Kaitlyn Gallegos, Sales Manager – Tour & Travel**

Kaitlyn Gallegos has been hired as the Sales Manager for Tour and Travel. Kaitlyn has an MBA from McNeese State and her undergraduate degree from Louisiana Tech. She previously held the role of Marketing Director for the City of Sulphur. Her focus will be growing the domestic market, working closely with tour operators and receptive tour operators.



KELLI FONTENOT

## **Kelli Fontenot, Media/Public Relations Manager**

Kelli Fontenot, a graduate from McNeese State University with a bachelors and master's degree in business administration, is the new Media/Public Relations Manager. She previously worked as the Director of Institutional Advancement for St. Margaret Catholic School and was most recently the Education Marketing and Public Relations Coordinator for the Houston Ballet.

# SALES TALES

▶ **REAL MEETINGS.  
REAL INCENTIVES.**



## Meeting Incentive Program

The LC/SWLA CVB launched a Meeting Incentive Program to entice more meeting planners to host their conferences and events in Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana. The program is designed to bolster a competitive advantage for the Lake Area when bidding on hosting events. In addition, the program also promotes more of an incentive should meeting planners choose to host their convention during what are designated as “needs

times” Jan. - March 15 and October 15-December 31. The program is in place through December of 2020. The incentive is a formula based on the amount of room nights, and the maximum amount that an organization can receive is \$5,000. For a complete overview of the program, log onto [www.visitlakecharles.org/incentive](http://www.visitlakecharles.org/incentive).



## LHSAA Annual Convention

This past January, Eric Zarter, sales director, attended the Louisiana High School Athletic Association (LHSAA) annual convention in Baton Rouge. Throughout the convention, Zarter was able to finalize various aspects of the upcoming spring tournaments that will be held in Southwest Louisiana. This past summer, the board of the LHSAA awarded the LHSAA State Championship Swim Meet and The Allstate Sugar Bowl LHSAA Softball State Championships to the Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana area for two additional years. Historically, the area has hosted swim for 12 years and softball for 18.

Other sporting events to be held in Southwest Louisiana include the Marsh Madness State Championship Tournament (March 4-9), and the LHSAA Baseball State Championship Tournament (May 8-11). Southwest Louisiana is known as the Youth Sports Capital of Louisiana, and as such, the area has benefited greatly from youth sports being an economic driver from softball, baseball and basketball to swimming and a myriad of other tournaments. We are fortunate to continue the successful partnerships with the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, SPAR, Ward 3 Recreation and the municipalities to enhance the athletic events and opportunities in Southwest Louisiana.



## Baton Rouge Mix & Mingle

The sales department will be hosting quarterly events throughout the year in Baton Rouge - one of the CVB's top markets. Each event will give the sales team the opportunity to promote the new openings of attractions, hotels and meeting space in Southwest Louisiana. The team will also educate meeting planners, associations and corporate clients about the new Meeting Incentive Program. The first event was held on Feb. 28 at Blend Wine Bar. These quarterly events, along with the meeting incentive program, will help generate new business opportunities and bolster overall room nights for Southwest Louisiana. For more information, contact Taylor Stanley at [tstanley@visitlakecharles.org](mailto:tstanley@visitlakecharles.org).

# GATOR BITES



TAYLOR STANLEY



MELISSA TRAHAN



COLTEN MILLER



WILL PRECHT

## Louisiana Tourism Leadership Academy

This January, Taylor Stanley, senior sales manager, and Melissa Trahan, tourist information manager, were presented as Louisiana Tourism Leadership Academy (LTLA) graduates at the Louisiana Travel Association's (LTA) Annual Membership Meeting and Luncheon. Additionally, Colten Miller, publications/systems manager and Will Precht, senior media/public relations manager, have been admitted into the 2019 LTLA class and will complete the program in 2020.

The goal of the LTLA program is to further educate those within the tourism industry by developing their leadership skills, strengthening their communication networks and informing them about the responsibilities of leadership in building and enriching their tourism-related organizations.



## New Arena for the Cowboys

The official opening ceremony for the new Health & Human Performance (H&HP) Educational Complex at McNeese State University was held this past January. The \$40 million complex can seat 4,200 and is home to the McNeese men's and women's basketball and volleyball programs, and the H&HP Department. Prior to this new facility, McNeese played its basketball games at Burton Coliseum since 1986. Chuck Kleckley, a McNeese alumnus and the first Louisiana Speaker of the House of Representatives from Calcasieu Parish, was also recognized for his efforts to secure state funding to build this state-of-the-art facility. The Charles E. "Chuck" Kleckley Room located on the second floor of the arena has been named in his honor.



## WELCOME TO LAKE CHARLES SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

Lake Charles, Louisiana right there in the heel of the boot. When you get to town just slip on your dancin' shoes, and sway to the music. Everybody's dancing, then go out to a show. Try your luck in the evening with the sun sinking low. Go out to dinner for some crabs and etouffees. Taste the boudin, and that bowl of hot gumbo. Make a toast to good times and new friends along the way. Catch all your treasures at the Mardi Gras parade, as the floats roll by, you can let your worries fade.

From the Calcasieu down to the Gulf of Mexico, you can smell the sweet magnolias. You can feel the warm breezes blow as the Spanish moss is moving slow. Go out to the water take a walk along the beach, and see the birds take flight with the sunlight on their wings.

COME TO OUR SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA HOME.



## VisitLakeCharles.org Redesign: Now LIVE!

The CVB is proud to present the redesigned VisitLakeCharles.org website. This redesign is aimed at making information more easily accessible over multiple devices with an emphasis on the mobile user experience. In addition, the look and feel have been updated to complement the progress that is occurring in our region.



## Mardi Gras Media Tour

The bureau will be hosting a Mardi Gras Media Tour, March 2-6, showcasing Louisiana's second largest Mardi Gras complete with king cake, zydeco dancing and family-friendly events. Writers from across the United States will tour the Mardi Gras Museum, test their bead tossing skills aboard a float in the Children's Parade, and even go behind the scenes at the Royal Gala prior to cheering on the krewes in full regalia. While in the Lake Area, they will also get to experience some great Cajun/Creole cuisine, participate in the Iowa Chicken Run and watch the Krewe of Krewes Parade. For more information on all things Mardi Gras in Southwest Louisiana, go to [www.swlamardigras.com](http://www.swlamardigras.com).



## Ward 3 Aquatic Center

Ward 3 Recreation now offers a place to swim year-round. The new natatorium, located at 3210 Power Center Parkway in Lake Charles, is now open. The facility includes an eight-lane, 25-yard competition pool, as well as a handicapped-accessible leisure pool and a cold-plunge pool. Membership rates start at \$12 a month. For more information, call **337-990-0112** or go to [www.lcward3recreation.com](http://www.lcward3recreation.com).

## Southeast Tourism Society Honors 7 Local Events



Every quarter, the Southeast Tourism Society (STS) selects the "Top 20 Events" for the month and highlights the best of the best festivals or events. The Southwest Louisiana honored events for the month of January were **Mardi Gras of Southwest Louisiana** (Jan. 6 – March 5), **The Louisiana Fur & Wildlife Festival** (Jan. 11-12), and the **Martin Luther King, Jr. Festival** (Jan. 18-21). Other honored events include the **Southwest District Livestock Show & Rodeo** (Jan. 31 –Feb. 2), the **Black Heritage Festival** (March 9), the **Iowa Rabbit Festival** (March 14-16) and **Lake Charles Civic Ballet's Assemblé 2019: A Dance Down Memory Lane** (March 23-24). The events are chosen from each of the following eleven STS member states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. As the Festival Capital of Louisiana, we are proud to have such unique and meaningful events in Southwest Louisiana!

## SWLA Goes to the Grammys



The Lake Charles area is fortunate to have two (2-time) GRAMMY nominees. Sean Ardoin, was nominated for Best American Roots Performance and Best Regional Roots album for this year's GRAMMY Awards, and Mickey Smith, Jr., was nominated and achieved the

status of GRAMMY Music Educator Finalist both in 2019 and 2015. The musicians are both motivational speakers and gifted communicators beyond the universal language of music. Sean Ardoin attended the GRAMMYS along with Will Precht, senior media/public relations manager from the LC/SWLA CVB. Ardoin represented #VisitLakeCharles throughout the GRAMMYS and while attending a GRAMMY event hosted by Louisiana and Mississippi, highlighting the artists and music from both Southern states.



# LAKE CHARLES

SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

LAKE CHARLES | SULPHUR | WESTLAKE  
DEQUINCY | VINTON | IOWA

1-800-456-SWLA | [www.VisitLakeCharles.org](http://www.VisitLakeCharles.org)  
1205 N. Lakeshore Drive | Lake Charles, LA 70601

PRESORTED  
STANDARD  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Lake Charles, LA  
Permit No. 215

## MISSION

To provide leadership in initiating and coordinating the worldwide marketing of Calcasieu Parish as a highly desirable leisure and convention destination; to solicit and service convention and other group-related business; and to engage in visitor promotions which generate overnight stays in Southwest Louisiana.

## VISION

To enhance and develop the economic fabric of the parish.

## SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA SPOTLIGHT

### “Lake Charles Local: Creole Culture” Video Unveiled

The City of Lake Charles and the CVB partnered to produce a video centered on Creole culture in Southwest Louisiana. The creative teams from both entities worked with two-time GRAMMY nominee, Zydeco artist Sean Ardoin, along with co-host Jackie Simien, to showcase the best places to experience Creole culture in the Lake Charles area.

“The CVB’s ‘Lake Charles Local: Meet the Locals’ video series provides an authentic look at how incredibly vibrant our city truly is, and we were inspired to seek other topics of interest. A number of ideas were generated and are in the works, but the video highlighting Creole culture is one that we felt needed to be completed in order to not only educate our community on just how deep Creole roots run in Lake Charles, but also to share this incredibly unique culture and show everyone how they can experience it right here in our own backyard,” said Mayor Hunter with the City of Lake Charles.

“From a tourism perspective, the Creole video is highly useful for people who have heard about Creole culture but really do not know what it is all about or where to experience it. Here in Lake Charles, there are many ties to Zydeco musicians and



Creole culture, so we were naturally thrilled to team up with the City of Lake Charles to help highlight this unique and important cultural aspect of Southwest Louisiana,” said Kyle Edmiston, Chief Operating Officer of the LC/SWLA CVB.

Throughout the video, Ardoin and Simien visit local eateries that serve Creole cuisine, and they also explain aspects of Zydeco music and Creole culture. In addition, they touch on historic, prominent

landmarks such as Ball’s Auditorium, and the video concludes with a Zydeco dance. To view the video and learn more about Creole culture, log onto [www.VisitLakeCharles.org/Creole](http://www.VisitLakeCharles.org/Creole).

