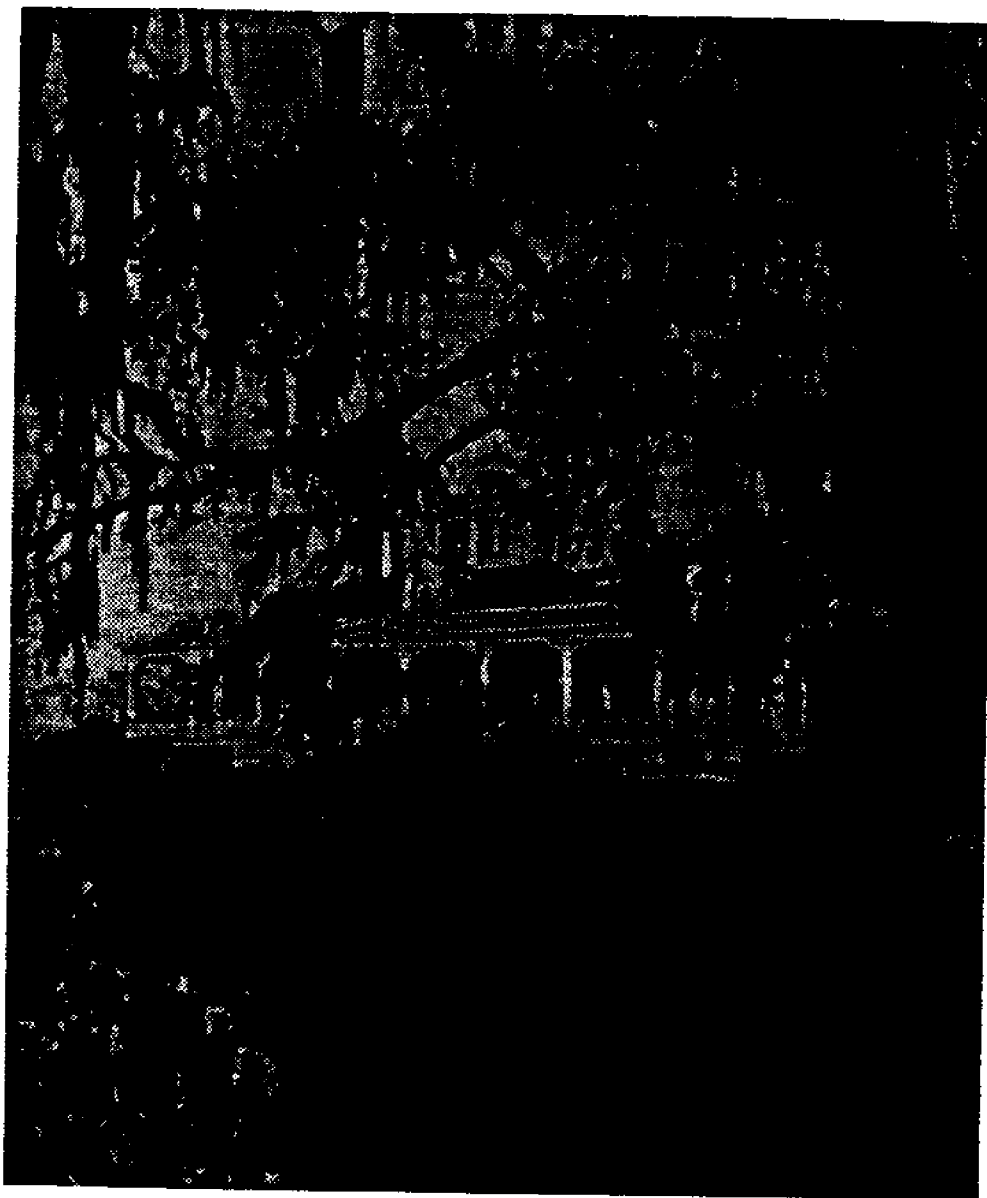


LOUISIANA **LOAN COPY ONLY**
RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
CONFERENCE



Summary of Proceedings

September 13-14, 1995

New Iberia, Louisiana

Summary of the Proceedings
of
The Louisiana Rural Tourism
Development Conference

September 13-14, 1995



•Sponsors: Louisiana Sea Grant College Program • Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, Louisiana
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The following excerpts from the conference have been prepared by the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program from tape recordings of the presentations. Copy was edited by Robyn Tippet and Marilyn Barrett. The intention is to provide a reference of the highlights of each presentation rather than a word-for-word reproduction.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Keynote Address

Don't Reinvent the Wheel — Just Redecorate It 1

Workshop

Financing Your Tourism Business

Part I: Dan Lavergne, Acadiana Small Business Development 5

Part II: Mike Taylor, Rural Economic and Community Development 8

Workshop

Electronic Marketing Tools

Part I: Ross Cruseman, Peter Mayer & Partners 10

Part II: Joe Campbell, Information Systems & Technologies, Inc. 13

Part III: Doug Bryant, Louisiana Office of Tourism 16

Success Stories

Find the Key to Unity: Columbia 21

One Person Band: Leadership in Gretna 24

Neighbors Tie Assets Together: River Road Plantations 26

Cheaper by the Dozen: St. Francisville Overnight 28

"I Can't Say No": Volunteerism in Cameron 30

Multiple Uses for Community Asset: Byerley House in Lake Providence 31

DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL— JUST REDECORATE IT

Larry Friedman, Nevada Commission of Tourism

I'm from Carson City, the capital of Nevada. Most of you probably thought Las Vegas was the capital. In fact, most people in Las Vegas think that Las Vegas is the capitol. I work with places in rural Nevada which you've never heard of. The title of this talk, "Don't Reinvent the Wheel, Just Redecorate It," refers to a rural tourism development technique. In rural Nevada and I'm sure rural Louisiana, money is not wasted. In fact, all assets are carefully used. Also, in both of our states, several similar attractions might exist. Along these lines, you need to figure out how to stand out, and how to separate your attraction or town from the pack.

We had 72 travel agents from the United Kingdom in Arizona. They were going to be treated to six presentations by six western states, six presentations from six different airlines, a presentation from the USTIA, and each presentation was to last an hour. That was 13 hours of presentation. My presentation was the afternoon of the second day. How was I going to keep these people awake, let alone interested with my slide show? I showed slides of Carson City, and when I was done, I would take off my souvenir shirt from Carson City, and throw it into the audience. I kept them awake while I did my Las Vegas strip. Oddly, without any preplanning, the woman after me did the same thing. I was from Nevada, a hot state, and I took clothes off; and without prior planning, the woman from Alaska, who was after me, put clothes on as she did her presentation. I used what I had to separate myself from the rest of the group.

Now I'm going to talk about other things that we have done. They may not be things that would necessarily fit for your community, but use them to stimulate thinking, to find ways to manipulate the things that work in Nevada to fit your community needs. For example, the town of Winnemucca had a problem. The town existed because people had to go through it to go across Nevada, then a new highway was built that went around instead of through the town. Winnemucca bought up as many billboards as they could

and put up signs like: "Winnemucca - City of Safe Streets; Winnemucca - Two Bar Stools, No Waiting; Winnemucca - One Traffic Light; Winnemucca - One Traffic Jam Every 10 Years; Winnemucca - 5 Billion People Have Never Visited; Winnemucca - English Spoken Here." One billboard had, "What is a Winnemucca?" By the time people driving along Interstate 80 got to Winnemucca, they had to stop because they were so curious. The townspeople devised a plan for developing a curiosity about their town. They laughed at themselves, they laughed at themselves for miles, and got people into their town. There was never any sophisticated research done on whether the billboard campaign worked or not, because they didn't have money for sophisticated research. But, every business person on the main street in Winnemucca, both blocks as a matter of fact, will tell you that the billboards worked because people were coming in and saying, "By the time I got here, I had to stop."

Here is a great restaurant promotion. This restaurant is in the middle of absolutely nowhere. You know, people say, location, location, location is important to a restaurant's success. Usually that's true, but this restaurant is not near anything. In the restaurant business, Monday and Tuesday nights are not your busiest nights. So, how do you build up business on Monday and Tuesday night? Once a month this restaurant owner substituted a letter for the bill. When his customers would open the portfolio to find their bill, they found a letter instead that would say, "You know, we're so thrilled that you are our guest, that we just don't feel right charging you all the time. So periodically, on a Monday or a Tuesday night each month, we are going to give you a free dinner. Thank you very much. Oh, by the way the staff is working for free, so please tip them generously." As you know, the best kind of advertising is word of mouth advertising. Once the word got out that periodically on Monday and Tuesday nights, this particular restaurant gave free dinners, business increased. For the customer, this was sort of like gambling to see if that letter would be substituted for the bill. For the restaurant, it

amounted to a 25% discount, because people paid for their dinners on the other Monday or Tuesday nights. We know restaurants discount all the time, and people are constantly couponing. This is just an adaptation of the same concept.

Now, back to "redecorating." A part of our state runs between Reno and Las Vegas. Is there anyone here who knows anything that runs between Reno and Las Vegas? Most people probably don't. But if you can get a travel writer or a sports writer to talk about one of those places between those two well-known cities like Hawthorne, Nevada, you have accomplished something. Between Reno and Las Vegas, we have unique golf courses. We have a fairly standard golf course in Yerrington, but the next one down is operated by the military. The next one, in Gabbs, is a golf course without a single blade of grass. The entire golf course is sand. Seriously, they were able to paint it green (laughter). The next golf course is in Furnace Creek, and you say, "Furnace Creek, that's in California." It may be in California, but the bed base is in Nevada. Then the next golf course is in Las Vegas. We've market these by press trips. We invite sportswriters to experience these very different, unique golf courses. We often invite senior writers and RV writers, because these golf courses are inexpensive and not crowded, they would appeal to those reading articles written in senior citizen and RV magazines. This is a generalization, a stereotype, but seniors love to play golf, they love to explore, and they've got the time and money, whether it is exploring rural Nevada or rural Louisiana. You see, we put this group of golf courses together as an attraction, conducted FAM tours, and brought in people.

Ten years ago *Life* magazine was doing a story, and they went to AAA to find the loneliest road in America. The person at AAA said, "Oh, the loneliest road in America is on Highway 50 in the state of Nevada. In fact, that road is so lonely you'd need a survival kit just to drive it." Well, that article in *Life* magazine upset the people along the highway. But they turned their anger around and promoted the loneliest road in America. We give out survival kits to anybody who wants them, but you have to get it stamped in all the towns

along Highway 50, all five of them. Then when you send the stamped kit back in, we send you a photo of a sign on Highway 50 which says, "I survived the loneliest road in America." Now, everybody wants the European visitor or the international visitor, but how are you going to get them? Europeans want to see the tallest, biggest, and they want to see the loneliest. The European press picked this up about three years ago, and now we have "Ich spreche ein kleines Deutsch" going on in Ely. Let me suggest that you take things like this and figure out how they can work for Louisiana. I think if somebody asks the question, "What states are known for a sense of humor or being a little off kilter?" The response would probably be "Nevada and Louisiana." I mean that quite affectionately. Along those lines, never take yourselves too seriously; take what you do seriously, but don't take yourselves too seriously.

Don't promise something you cannot deliver. I used to work for a sternwheeler company up at Lake Tahoe. A cruise on a sternwheeler is a great time or can be an outrageous good time. But, it is not necessarily that. If you operate a sternwheeler, one of your primary markets is the senior market. Should you offer an outrageous good time? Consider: The senior market does not necessarily want outrageous — they raised outrageous. They don't need any more outrageous. A little different approach, by the sternwheeler company where I worked, was to put on our billboards and everything else, "Don't miss". We chose this open-ended slogan for two reasons. One, it contained a call to action, and the owner of our company believed that a marketing strategy had to be a call to action. Second, if you are with an attraction in a community, you need to get the word out to the people coming through or staying in that community that they haven't really seen your community unless they've been to your attraction. So, the idea for the *Tahoe Queen* was "Don't Miss" — you have not been to Lake Tahoe until you have been on the *Tahoe Queen*.

Remember, you should always tell the truth. With the sternwheeler, we used to say, "You have not seen the lake until you have seen it from the lake's point of view." That is true. Think about it — it is an incredible

experience to see the land from the water. Another attraction marketing technique we used at the *Tahoe Queen* was a joint ticket with the Heavenly Tram, so that people could go to either one of these attractions. There would be a sign there telling them that they could buy tickets to both attractions at a discount from single purchase at each place.

At the *Tahoe Queen*, I learned an invaluable lesson. We went into one season and we were flat. We had never been flat, we had always been up. That was the season when we had raised our prices so that we were more expensive than the other sternwheeler on Lake Tahoe. Now, it would have been very easy to have said, "Well, if the owner hadn't wanted to raise the prices, maybe we would have more people on our boat." But our general manager said, "Let's first investigate everything that we are doing, and everything that we have done, to make sure the problem is not us." Well, we had changed the color of our brochure. It was in beautiful color, and one that we all liked. But we wanted to find out what others thought. So, I went to the Optimists, Rotary and the Lions Club, to the local residents, and asked which brochure they liked better. Everyone said that the new brochure was more attractive; it was a nicer color. The old brochure had this obnoxious carnival orange border, but their comments told us that the obnoxious border had helped us. The orange border caught people's attention. When your brochure is in a rack at a motel with 40 other brochures, and the consumer looks over the rack rapidly, you have one opportunity to attract attention. From all of these examples we learned some lessons. First, you're not marketing to your own people or to yourself, you're marketing to somebody else. Second, if things are not going well, really take a look at everything you're doing. Don't jump to an easy conclusion. Finally, be certain that your brochure "pops." One of the best ways to do that is with color – whether it is an obnoxious red or a carnival orange.

The biggest success I've ever had for dinner dance cruises at the *Tahoe Queen* was in winter when it's cold and the last place people want to be is on the lake, in a boat. But who's at Lake Tahoe during the winter months? The skiers. And, what do skiers like?

An after ski party. So, that dinner dance cruise became an after ski party. Same boat, same cocktails, same band, same everything, but it was called an after ski party. Apparently that sounded hot as opposed to a dinner dance cruise, which sounded cold. Market to the people who are in your area at a particular time of year. If you have skiers coming through in the winter, market to them.

What do you have to sell? What are your assets? This "redecorating" comes from Carson City. Carson City is a half hour from Reno and a half hour from Tahoe. Why would a person go to Carson City when you can go to Reno or to Tahoe? Carson City hired a research company to find out why those who had visited Carson City chose that location. They found that their typical visitor was over 55, desiring a low key, sensible, friendly gaming experience. So, Carson City then pursued the market that they had found and figured that they would continue to market in that direction. Las Vegas took a different approach. They realized the family market accounted for only seven percent of visitors to Las Vegas, and they wanted to increase the number of visitors from that target market. So they promoted the elements that Las Vegas has to offer to a family. The concept caught on. They received great media attention and they got families to start coming. They still needed the adult gamer to meet their tourism goals, but they added a whole different market segment.

How does a place that has no tourism yet "redecorate?" In an agricultural town called Yerrington, the townspeople still need to decide if they even want to have tourists. You can do this by interviewing people and using the answers to questions to determine what your product is, who you want to access for marketing, and if your town even wants to be a tourism product. Just a couple of weeks ago, we asked questions of the Yerrington Chamber of Commerce director and Chamber board of directors. Then we asked questions of 20 different key people in Yerrington. Interviewing 20 people was incredible "PR" for the Chamber because some of these people had never been asked questions before. It made them feel like they were part of the process. In particular, two women who put on the Indian Pow Wow had never been incorporated into the

white society of Yerrington. Yet, the Pow Wow draws people fascinated by the Native American culture and the whole idea of Pow Wow. In addition to those 20 people, an article went out in the newspaper encouraging townspeople to fill out a questionnaire. You can see that the benefits from this process, even if your town never goes into tourism are obvious.

Hospitality is important, too. (Speaker showed a video of the hospitality program in Lake Tahoe, featuring a postal worker. The emphasis is on citizens who may be representing the town without realizing it. When a stranger asks for directions or asks questions in a store or at a gas station, the townspeople who responds is marketing the town, although he/she may not be aware of the fact.)

One of the cheapest, best ways to go about promoting the community is through public speaking. If you are ever in New Orleans and any place else where you have the opportunity, make some phone calls. The Lions Club, the Rotary, and the Optimists are always looking for speakers. Whoever is in charge of speakers that month would welcome somebody volunteering to speak. Lots of people in your own state don't know what you have to offer. I mention that because one of the reasons why I'm here is I'd met Rochelle [Dugas] when she was doing some public speaking. She was talking about some of the things that were going on in Abbeville such as the Junior Ambassador Program. These are the kinds of programs that can be duplicated in other states.

There's a little town in the Reno Territory with a bed and breakfast on a tight budget. The owner didn't have the money to publish a brochure. So, we helped her contact 15 other bed and breakfasts around the state and they collectively put together a four color, beautiful brochure. Together the cost to each was about a hundred bucks. What is also important about a brochure is how it is distributed. The distribution points for this brochure are all of the partners in this brochure. It was one way for these very small bed and breakfasts to be able to do a brochure together. It is incredible what you can do with partnership.

One more lesson for you — never, ever

go back on your word. I think that in most parts of Nevada and Louisiana much can be done on a handshake. I hope that is never lost. A prominent hotel casino had numerous contracts with tour operators and promised them special rates. Then a year ago last March, this hotel casino sent them all letters saying that the promised rates would no longer be honored, and, as a result, the tour operators association wanted us to remove any reference to the property from our presentation although Las Vegas continued to promote it. The lesson here: don't aggravate businesses you might need in the future.

The last lesson to learn is that it is cheaper to advertise closer to home. It is easier for me to get people from Oregon, Washington, and Idaho to access Nevada, than for me to spend a lot of time in Louisiana trying to promote these places. Look to your neighboring states for your community's tourism potential. It's easier to spend and it's easier to successfully market closer to home.

FINANCING YOUR TOURISM BUSINESS

Dan Lavergne, Acadiana Small Business Development

PART I

The first thing that I want you to understand is that financing a small business is not what it appears. It's kind of like the story about the state trooper on Interstate 10. He is known for pulling over people. One day, he pulls over this old Cajun who was kind of nervous. The trooper said, "Man, what are you doing?" The Cajun says, "I'm late, I work for the circus." The trooper said, "What do you do in the circus?" And the Cajun says, "I'm a juggler." The trooper thought, "Ah, no way this guy can be a juggler." But the Cajun said, "Let me prove it to you." So he opens up his trunk and starts pulling out some machetes and then, he begins to juggle them. Meanwhile, old Boudreaux and Thibodeaux pass by and Boudreaux says, "My God, them sobriety tests are getting tough!" (laughter) Things are not always as they appear.

Today I'm going to talk to you about financing. I'm going to tell you a banker's secrets (that is, when you go to borrow money at the bank, the banker sits behind that desk, and refers to a list that only he sees). I'm going to tell you what his list means.

The first thing he's going to do when you submit a loan application is to ask if you are of good character. He is asking you if you have ever declared bankruptcy, and he is also asking if you have some sort of police record. He wants to know if you have ever been charged with a felony. When you file an application for a Small Business Administration (SBA) loan, your fingerprints will be matched with those in the FBI computer. It's important that you explain this before the FBI check is made. I can't tell you how many times I've helped an SBA loan applicant, and everything would be jeopardized because the check indicated a felony. The most common one, believe it or not, is carrying a gun into an airport. Many times, a traveler has a gun in his or her briefcase, and for possession, he or she can then be charged with a felony. These types of mistakes, where no illegal intent existed, can be explained. It is important to tell the banker about felonies rather than have them discovered through your application.

Next, bankers ask you to show ability to operate a business successfully. Just as it is obvious that I can't open up a business as a brain surgeon without some training, I can't open up a business as a tour guide or try some other aspect of tourism without some training or experience in it. We had a fast food restaurant chain borrow the money to open up a new restaurant. The owner did not have any restaurant experience, so he hired a person with 30 years of restaurant experience to be his manager. That passed the test, demonstrating the ability to operate the restaurant. You don't have to be an experienced tour guide operator if you can hire one. But there's more to operating a business successfully than training or experience.

You need to show that the proposed loan is of sound value. What does that mean? The project has to be carefully conceived so that it will be successful. For example, don't go to a loan officer and say, "I have an idea. I can create the Cajun Disney Land. I've got some property on the other side of Port Barre in the swamp." The banker's eyes are going to start rolling. Instead, show him how you are going to operate, what your place will look like. How are you going to build it?

Then show him your management plan. Who will be responsible? What employees will you have? Who will they be? Show that you expect to have enough profit to pay the employees and the other expenses, and pay back the loan.

You can support the description with some statistics. You use your past earnings record and future prospects for new business to indicate that you will be successful. In rural areas this may be a problem because many rural areas have been showing population decreases, and these

are accompanied by sales tax decreases. That means you cannot demonstrate that there is a growing population to use your business, or that business is so good in your area that people will spend money at your attraction. The banker is going to ask you, "Where are you going to get the business to repay the loan?" You must have an answer.

The regulations state very clearly, whether you apply for an SBA loan or to the local banker for a straight commercial loan, the money cannot be loaned unless you can prove you can repay the loan.

The loan officer will say you must have enough capital in your existing firm to combine with an SBA loan to operate on a sound financial basis. Let me interpret that for you. They ain't putting up all the money. You've got to have some of your own money in this venture.

Then bankers want to talk about "reasonable equity" and "collateral." Equity is the dollar value of the business after all the claims and liens have been paid. Collateral is property pledged by the borrower to protect the interests of the lender. These are related to the profitability of the loan and to the success of the business.

Now, what a banker thinks is reasonable equity, and what you think is reasonable equity are two different things. It's all a matter of your viewpoint. The banker will want you to put up as much of the needed money for the project as possible. That way, his bank takes less of the risk. Thus, if the new venture fails and you fail to pay back the loan, his bank doesn't experience a terrible loss. But you don't want to invest everything — for a similar reason. If the business doesn't make it, you don't want to be left with nothing at all. You want to put in a certain amount of your net worth, but you want to hold some back. So, you and the loan officer have to compromise on the amount that will be considered reasonable. Generally, lending institutions expect you to have 30% of the cash needed for the venture. So, if you're going to open up a hundred thousand dollar business, you've got to have 30 grand. To be safe, that should not be every bit of equity you have.

Some of your property is pledged as a guarantee that your business will be successful. You look at this collateral as a sort of guarantee that the new venture will succeed. You don't expect to have to use this collateral. A banker is going to try to protect his bank from loss so he will want you to pledge as much of your property as possible. Then, if the business incurs debt, the collateral can be sold to pay the debt. But lenders look at the value of collateral in a little different way than other people. The banker looks at collateral as, "What can I get from that piece of property if I have to sell it in six months?" In other words, he wants to know how much he can get for your property under immediate circumstances. He does not look at long term value of a property although you do. They have a computer program that sets a dollar value or rate on houses, stores, furniture, or fixtures, or inventory by maximum points. To cover uncertainties, lenders use this rule of thumb: If a client wants to borrow \$100,000, require \$200,000 worth of collateral.

Generally, banks don't like you to borrow money to repay debt. Another problem that we have especially in the rural areas, is that bankers don't like to loan you money to buy out your brother, your dad, your sister. Even if it's a good deal. They expect your relative to finance it for you.

You can really make a difference in the terms of a loan. Remember, the banker wants the shortest period of time for the loan, and you want the longest period. You want the longest period because that spreads out the time you have to repay the loan, increasing the number of monthly payments. Each individual payment will be lower. The banker wants the shortest period because he doesn't want to gamble on your business over a long period. You and the banker will have to compromise. Try to get the longest period possible. Generally, 5-6-7 years is about the maximum allowed on an SBA loan. Negotiate it.

How do you get an SBA loan? You go to a bank, not the SBA. Which bank? I'll tell you a secret. Not all banks make SBA loans, and not all banks that make SBA loans are worth going to. For example, in Louisiana, there are about 15 banks certified through SBA

that make numerous loans, and they can actually respond to your application for an SBA loan within three days. Although the SBA won't tell you which bank go to, they will tell you which bank makes the most loans. And, good news, the number 1 and number 2 banks in Louisiana that make the most SBA loans are in rural areas because they like the smaller loans. So, you're really in pretty good shape if you want an SBA loan in a rural area.

By the way, never go to a branch bank to get an SBA loan. Branch banks loan money only for cars, vacations, home equity. You'll have a better chance if you go to the main office, and ask for the top loan officer. If you have prepared well and you know your loan application is for a project with good potential for success, don't be discouraged if you are turned down. Go to another bank. There is no penalty for applying at another bank. Before you go to the bank, I would really suggest that you go to a small business development center and review your loan package with them. They will help you identify the weaknesses and strengths in your loan application. For example, a center can run a computer program that can identify a shortfall in equity or collateral. It's much better to find out from a small business center that can help you correct the problem before you face a loan officer.

Most business loan applications ask for a well developed business plan. They want the answers to these questions: What is your product? What will your anticipated expenses and profits be? Who are you going to sell your product to? What is your competition? There are some basic questions the loan review committee expects you to provide in the business plan like what's your address and phone number as well as the address(es) and phone number(s) of your competition? This plan or summary provides enough information for a loan officer to take your loan application before a board, and intelligently answer board members' questions. That loan officer has to defend your loan package before a loan committee.

Right now in Louisiana we're processing about 800 SBA loans a year. These have increased considerably. Three years ago we only processed about 160 annually. Although there are a tremendous number of new business loan applications, if you have a good, feasible program, I really think you can get financing in today's market.

SBA has a one page application for loans of about \$25-30-50 thousand. The one page application has one little key element, and that is, they are going to base everything off of your credit history. If you have a clean credit history, this simple application will do the job. For small or large loans, don't apply if you owe Uncle Sam any taxes. That's not a sign of good credit.

In terms of percentages, how does a banker look at the things that I talked about? About 20% of the approval you need for your loan package is based on your management. Can you manage your business once they give you the money? About 30% (the highest portion of the decision) is based on your repayment ability. Your credit history is the basis of about 10% of the decision. Some people think that good credit makes them eligible for any amount, but that is not true. A good credit history only contributes 10% to the approval because it represents the past. The future is what they're looking for. Therefore, good equity will support about 20% of the approval and good collateral, another 20%. (Notice, 40% of your whole loan package is based upon what kind of money you have in the project.)

FINANCING YOUR TOURISM BUSINESS

Mike Taylor, Rural Economic and Community Development

PART II

Most of you probably know and remember that I represent the Farmers Home Administration, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We have done a lot of rural financing around the state of Louisiana through the years, but Farmers Home Administration doesn't exist any more. We've gone through some name changes. Right now we're called Rural Economic and Community Development. Within that mission area we serve as three different agencies—we are a utility service to finance water and sewer projects, we operate a rural business and cooperative loan service branch, and we have a rural community and development branch.

I'm going to give you the bad news first. We can't finance tourism directly. So why did they invite me? Well, while we can't directly finance tourism and recreation projects, we can do and have done around the state a lot of things that are essential for these type projects to happen. We can build in support for them. For example, through our infrastructure program and rural utility service, we can extend water lines, and sewer lines. Through our community service programs, we can extend roads, streets, and electrical lines into those service areas. You've got to have that infrastructure to support anything that you're doing. We work with those programs in communities with a population of 10,000. It is an active program. We probably did some \$40 million across the state of Louisiana this year in infrastructure and finance. Our work is geared towards two areas: (1) providing water supplies and sewer treatment facilities through rural communities, and (2) business development of rural communities.

In our business program area, we have three different basic business development tools that we can use. The most popular item is our business and industry loan guarantee program. It is generally a niche

above the size of SBA loans. If the application is for less than \$250,000, it should be submitted first to the SBA. If it's larger than \$250,000, it can be secured from many sources, but it can be guaranteed by our program. We don't make loan units, we administer a loan guarantee program. To be specific, we are finance experts who help people who want to start new businesses access financing. We've probably done around \$10-12 million worth of loan guarantees in the state this year, many by either intermediary re-lending and rural business enterprise grants.

Our intermediary re-lending program put several million dollars worth of loans across the state this year. This is a loan that can be made through an intermediary at a 1% interest rate for a period not to exceed 10 years. An intermediary, in this case, can be a municipality, a special purpose district, or not-for-profit corporation that will use the funds to stimulate business within their service area. For example, the service area could be the corporate limits of Kinder. The town of Kinder could apply for this loan and then re-lend that money at a different rate. In fact, they could pay back our loan at 1% interest, cover administrative costs and even earn a little profit, while still charging the borrower slightly below market interest rate. Remember, we can't finance anything that is strictly recreation and tourism, but tourism can benefit. For example, the intermediary could be a planning and development district, such as the one in Monroe called the North Delta Planning and Development District. They are relending \$2 million in those communities. How does this help tourism? The loans are being used for projects in downtown development areas to restore downtown development districts and do storefront improvements. Most are small loans for retail businesses. The results are really enhancing the looks of those downtown communities, and drawing people back into those areas. I think it is one of the best programs that we have developed in years. The program lets the borrowers at the local level make money decisions. People in those communities

are supervising those funds and recognizing that you still have to make quality loans. They are making sure that they can recover the borrowed money and repay the loan to our agency, and that business is going to be a success out there.

This program assists economic development in a rural area by taking those existing businesses and expanding them, adding jobs, enhancing the community and drawing people into it, and creating new businesses that fit in with the existing general market niche.

Another program that we have is our rural business enterprise grants. Although funds are extremely limited in this program, everybody's eyes open up a little bit more when I say, "grant." The grant, usually about \$100,000, can be used in the same way as the re-lending program. The same basic applicant pool — a town, a not-for-profit corporation, downtown development district, a Chamber of Commerce, or planning and development district. We've had some tremendous examples of success in developing some downtown areas with that program. I would like to point to a couple: The Jennings Downtown Development Area utilized that program to finance some of their downtown development activities. Hammond has done this through the Hammond Downtown Development Authority. A downside of these grants is the limited funds. Right now we have probably \$4 million worth of applications on hand for that program and we are only expecting to receive about \$400,000 in funding. But, there are people in the audience right now who can attest to the fact that persistence and patience can eventually pay off.

I would like you to concentrate on the intermediary re-lending program because it has more available funds and because it is a long-term program. Given the rarity and scarcity of grant programs these days, a 1% loan over an extended term is almost as good as a grant. It enhances your chances of being funded if you apply for those dollars. Another downside is that we're a federal agency, and current changes in federal budgeting policy leave questions about the future of our funding programs. I now have responsibility for the overall coordination and funding efforts for

these programs.

I am pretty excited about what's going on in Louisiana right now. Although, some problems exist across the state, there are more examples of economic development right now than I have seen in about 10-15 years. If we can stop being our own worst enemy, thinking of ourselves as last in so many things, we can take advantage of the many opportunities in the state. The good things going on are going to create a snowball effect.

We'll be happy to talk to you about any ideas and policies that you may have and try to help you access some of our funds. We coordinate with the SBA, work pretty closely with the business development centers and other business incubators around the state. We want to be a resource that's available to you.

ELECTRONIC MARKETING TOOLS

Ross Cruseman, Peter Mayer & Partners

PART I

There are many opportunities for electronic technology in the travel industry. Welcome to the electronic frontier. New technologies are appearing every day — new types, new methods to communicate with your customers, new ways to attract your customers.

Some of the most popular today are automated voice response systems. This is really a fancy answering machine available to everybody with a telephone. If you've got a telephone and people can call your business, you can use automated voice response to get information back to that customer. There are some advantages to using an automated voice response system. (1) It is very easy to update. You can change your messages every hour if you want to. (2) Messages can be customized. (3) Automated voice response is relatively inexpensive compared to other types of advertising and marketing tools.

However, this technology is not very flexible. You have an opportunity to give only a small part of your overall message, and because of consumer resistance to long, detailed menus, it can't be complicated. For example, this technology does a good job of providing customers with their account balances. But automated voice response systems are difficult to track. For example, the system can provide information on how many people called your phone number and what types of information they sought, but it can't tell you who they are. You cannot capture any information about where they are or who they are, both important types of marketing information.

Another type of system that has become very popular recently is a FAX back system. This is a FAX machine that will automatically send a FAX back to the person who is calling. This system is very flexible, and you can customize it within reason. It is relatively inexpensive. The equipment is easy to install and requires very little maintenance. However, it also has a couple of disadvantages. (1) Your customer has to have a FAX machine or FAX software built into his or her computer. (2) Information is also difficult to track. This system is a little bit better than voice response. You get a phone number, which also tells you where the customer is located, but you don't learn anything else.

Finally, we come to the computer based systems. These systems can be broken down into three groups. The first is compact disc or floppy disk, which is just like your CD disc except it is made for your computer. You can use these with any kind of presentation. They can be interactive. You can have as much information or as little information on that disk as you wish, but your client or potential customer will only see the information that they are interested in. It can be very interactive as well as entertaining. This system is relatively inexpensive once you develop the program. You can produce compact disks or floppy disks for as little as a dollar each. They are easy to mail. This technology does have disadvantages. (1) It might be easier to print the information since the disk has to be replaced to be updated. (2) Many computers are not equipped with CD capabilities. This is an emerging technology.

The second system includes online services like CompuServe, Prodigy, America On Line. They are available to almost anybody that has a computer, and almost all new computers are shipped with the software to access these services. They are very easy to use, and very consumer oriented. They don't require any kind of technical experience to use them. You can communicate to your customers through these for a price, using a classified ad system. This technology operates very much like buying a small classified ad in a newspaper. You can post your message on the online forum or bulletin board. You can put your message on this electronic bulletin board, just like you stick it on the corkboard. You can even go on line with photographs. It's just

like buying from an electronic version of a catalogue. The consumer can read about all the features, see the price, see a picture of the product, and order that product on line. One of the disadvantages of electronic shopping, the ability to charge on a credit card with guaranteed security, is being eliminated. Microsoft and two other companies have just offered what they call an encryption system. This encryption program allows you to use your credit card number without the risk of having your credit card number stolen. It communicates your credit card to the business. This is being used for hotel and airline reservations as well as for buying a product. These systems also offer access to the Internet. The disadvantage to these systems is expense. They are expensive for the advertiser to be on the service, and also they are expensive for the consumer to use. They all charge by the minute, just like making a long distance phone call.

The third system is the Internet. This is really made up of a lot of different components. Where is the Internet from; what is it? It's the world's largest network of computers. They share a common language. The purpose of the Internet was to find a way for all the different computers around the country and ultimately around the world to be able to communicate with each other. Technology creates the ability for any computer to connect at any point on this network of computers to any other point on that network. It means you can access information, files, photographs, any type of information, software programs, from any computer that's attached to the Internet. As a matter of fact, access is worldwide, global. Virtually anywhere you have a telephone line you can get on the Internet now.

How did the Internet all start? It began as a government or military project back in the 1960's — a Cold War project to develop a way to maintain the computing power of the United States government if this country came under direct attack. For example, this system was designed to allow the government to use a computer anywhere in the country if a central computer was blown up in Washington, D.C. This diversified the computing power of the United States. Subsequently, the National Science Foundation became involved, and this

system added colleges and universities to the system, becoming a system linking military computers with college and university computers. The colleges and universities wanted to use the system to facilitate their research. For example, a professor at LSU could consult another professor at a university in California using the government's system. They could send data back and forth so that both professors could examine the same material.

Commercial applications, such as the marketing applications, were added much later. These have been prominent on the Internet only in the last few years, but they have been responsible for all of the growth. Currently, there are five million networks that make up the Internet, with over 30 million computers. That number is growing at an estimated 30% per month — an outrageous growth rate.

The Internet is made up of several different areas, which I call functional areas. The first is Telnet, a telephone system for computers. All the computers are connected over telephone lines. Through this function, one computer can be used to log onto another computer anywhere else in the world. Then the first computer becomes a terminal for the second computer. This works all the time, but it is not a commercial application visible to the user.

Second is FTP — File Transfer Protocol — or gopher. This originally was developed to allow you to transmit information from one computer to another. For example, if you wanted a document on the migratory habits of a particular bird, you could log onto a computer that had that information and retrieve that information into your computer. Or if someone had a computer program to balance a checkbook and you wanted a copy of it, you could download that program to your computer, and then you'd be able to balance your checkbook on your computer. FTP is very much in use today, but it's not a user-friendly system. This is simply a tool.

News groups make up the third functional area. These are the Internet

version of the bulletin boards that you see on the services like CompuServe, Prodigy, and America On Line. There are 12,000 news groups that exist today, and they are topic specific. For example, there may be a news group that covers the weather in Lake Charles, Louisiana. This functional area provides a way for people to trade information, to communicate, but it cannot be commercial. These almost exclusively discourage any kind of commercial application or advertising.

The E-mail function is just like putting a letter in the mail today except you are doing it electronically. As a matter of fact, you've probably heard that there's E-mail and then the U.S. Postal Service, called Snail-Mail. (laughter) E-mail is popular because it is fast. It allows you to send a message instantaneously to anybody that has an E-mail account. It also has very low cost. Access to it is usually included in any type of electronic access that you might have. So where it costs 32 cents to send a letter via the mail, you can send E-mail to your guests or customers for relatively no cost. It's very easy to track because it is a computer-to-computer system. You know who you sent that E-mail to automatically. You have their address, you know what you sent to them, you get a confirmation, it's like sending everything with a receipt requested through the mail. You know if they got it, and if they read it. You know where they are — a very powerful tool, growing very fast. This electronic tool is great for relationship marketing. It's very easy to build a mailing list and send information out to those on it once a day, once a week, once a month. You can control it. You can automatically set a frequency so that a message goes out from you if you haven't heard from someone in X number of days or a process of sending a message X number of days after they visit. This is a very inexpensive way to stay in touch with your customers.

The last function area is a mailing list. A mailing list is very much like a news group except it doesn't use a bulletin board. It's similar to an electronic chain letter. You join a mailing list, and then when you send mail to that mailing list, it sends whatever you sent to everybody else who is on that mailing list. There are 10,000 lists like that in existence today. You may focus on different topics, like tourism, bed and breakfasts, discount travel, senior travel; but it's a little bit more focused than a bulletin board because the people in the mail group all have a similar interest, and most of the communications are focused on common topics.

Most people associate the World Wide Web with the Internet. When people say they have joined the Internet, they are actually referring to the World Wide Web, which is the fastest growing part of the Internet. As a matter of fact, the number of people using the Web grew 1800% last year, and that number will be small compared to what happens this year and the next year. The Web makes the Internet very user-friendly.

ELECTRONIC MARKETING TOOLS

Joe Campbell, Information Systems & Technologies, Inc.

PART II

The World Wide Web was actually instituted by a firm in Switzerland, and the program to make use of it was developed by a firm called MESA. They called the program Mosaic. Mosaic is a browser and a translator. It takes the text information that you have on the Internet and changes it into graphics and pleasant, formatted text.

On the World Wide Web, you use hyperlinks. What is a hyperlink? Now you're getting into the real whoozy word. HyperLinks electronically connect text from many different sources. For the user, this word means, "If I put my mouse on it, it will take me somewhere else." It will help you get information from many sources. Since marketing is predominantly the element that you're most interested in, you would use the Web to get information or gather data for research that will help you market, such as demographic research, research or information that relates to your job, or your business.

Not only can you find the information for yourself in doing research on the Internet, but you can also ask for help from other people who have access to it. For example, among the thousands of news groups, you are going to find people that are in travel and tourism. If you have questions about their efforts and what they're doing, you just write a little note and say, "Hey, guys, I'm real interested in this. Can anybody give me some information on this?" Boom! The information comes back from people world wide.

The Internet is also full of free software which you can download through the File Transfer Protocol. Even some software for using parts of the Internet is available that way.

How can you get to these marketing tools? Both Macintosh and IBM compatible personal computers and main frame computers work on the Internet. They can all use it because the Internet is completely text-based.

It is sort of a two-way typewriter, but the browsers allow you to translate this text into a more user-friendly, enjoyable hypertext. You can actually go in and download these browsers for free from the Internet, and keep up to speed.

How can E-mail help with marketing? It is a tool to contact your clients, quickly and easily. For example, you can establish a list of 100 people and send them all a message. You type it out, and you click on the little button that tells the system to send this message to all 100 people, and all 100 people get your message. This same method can be used to talk to suppliers — get information and do ordering. If you have a product, people can order from you over the Internet. We already mentioned the fact that you can safely use your credit card on it. In your own company, your sales agents, your representatives in far flung areas around the world, can be in regular contact with you. You can download information to them everyday on new projects, new proposals, new regions, new areas that you're going through in your business, and be able to disseminate work world wide. I'm working with a client right now in an engineering firm in Mandeville, Louisiana, with two engineers — one in the Hammond area, and the other one in Metairie. At present, they pass information back and forth by making a floppy disk and mailing it. On the Internet, they can work together on engineering drawings and plans just as if they were working in the same office.

The Internet is an excellent tool for reservations. People can make reservations over the Internet for airlines, hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts. The Louisiana Department of Tourism can keep in contact with all of you over the Internet System.

Finally, the Internet never closes. It is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Some people have insomnia and get on the Internet and start surfing the Internet - that's what we call it — even in the middle of the night. This person might click on your business and decide to make a reservation. In essence, you might

get some business while your office is closed!

You don't have to have a contract with the Internet nor do you have to have a computer in your home. You can give your "snail mail" address or telephone number, or you can have E-mail queries downloaded by someone who has a computer (a friend or professional service). We download the information, print it out, and send it to you. You don't need to know anything. But, as you become more and more computer literate, and more and more familiar with the Internet, you will want to start doing more and more for yourself.

What do you need to know about computers to get your business on the Internet? You don't need to know anything at all about computers. All you need to do is to go to someone who can help you get a home page. A home page is an electronic brochure, assembled with technology to make it readable from a video screen instead of printed form. It has some graphics and pleasing text, just like your brochures. This home page can feature your attraction or business, or it can feature your community. For example, your community can have a home page with answers to questions like: Where to go? Where to eat? Where to shop? Where to stay? that includes your business or attraction and many others as well.

You have the capability to build a home page and put it on the Internet, but there are a few problems associated with building a home page. First, a home page is written with HTML code. First, I will show you one of these home pages, then I will switch over to what is called the source code, so you can see an HTML coded page. HTML stands for Hyper-Text Mark-up Language. It's a lot of words, but anyway it's the language you make home pages with. You have to learn how to use this language. There are many books available to help you learn this language or you can hire a firm to help you make one of these pages.

The second problem is graphics, the art of your brochure. If you want a graphic on your home page, your electronic brochure, you need to digitize that information using a scanner, or you must get a graphics program to

help you build these on your computer. Normally, people will take a photograph of something like a city monument or tourism building that is well known, or your logo, and scan it into the computer. Be creative, just as you would when designing a brochure. A home page service can do this for you.

Your home page can include forms for reservations, getting information, getting people on a mailing list. It is designed so that a person reading your home page can click on the place to learn about your locality. Then you provide a place for this person to put a snail mail and/or E-mail address so that you can mail the requested information. Their entry automatically comes to your computer. When you download, you can send them the information. (When you construct the home page using HTML, you will be setting this up.)

A third problem is associated with computer interface. If you make your own home page or electronic brochure, you will then have to load it onto the Internet. That takes some knowledge about computers. The environment differs from personal computers to main frames. For example, if you design the brochure on a personal computer (either IBM compatible or Macintosh), you can probably save it in DOS or Text as well as in the word processing program you are using. But when you load it to the main frame computer, it will be in units. So, you have to know how to work with these two forms. It's not difficult, but it is another thing to learn.

Finally, putting your own home page on the Internet is like putting your name in the white pages of the telephone directory. For people to call you, they must know you and look up your telephone number in the telephone directory. People have to know your Internet address or have some tool to find your page. You can, of course, publish your Internet address. On line, you can be included in travel and tourism listings for Louisiana through the search entry and search capability elements of the Internet. How can you get your name on that search entry? Firms like ours help you make a home page and make your name available for information searches.

We're now going to move quickly into

the USA CityLink project. It's a little over a year old, and already there are 800 cities in the United States on USA CityLink. Approximately 35,000-90,000 people access USA CityLink a day. This is the #1 place on the Internet accessed by people who want to go on a vacation, who are just looking for places to go. It is the #1 place on the Internet for travel and tourism.

USA City Link has on staff creative people that build their own pages. They will design and build the graphics for you if you need it, or, if you have your own graphics, use them in a design that meets with your approval. This is an online link of cities, providing information for travel and more. It is also designed as a place for people who want to relocate. For example, a person can click on a place on the screen and request information about the city for relocation purposes. He or she can even receive subsequent contact from a realtor. Many Louisiana locations are already on line with USA City Link such as the French Quarter, St. Tammany Parish, and Opelousas.

[rest of this session was online demonstration]

ELECTRONIC MARKETING TOOLS

Doug Bryant, Louisiana Office of Tourism

PART III

Are you out of it if you have never been on the Internet? No. A recent Newsweek poll found that only 13% of American adults have been on line and only 4% have ever viewed the World Wide Web—the fastest growing segment of the Net. Only 2% log onto a network for an hour each day. Currently, only 10% of Americans can even access the Internet. You aren't out of it.

You are in the vast majority of Americans, but you probably shouldn't be. Modern sales have doubled since last May as more and more Americans get wired. There are computers in a third of American households, so the potential for Internet growth is significant. If we use the radio in the late 1920s as an analogy, we can logically predict that the Internet will soon enter many American homes. Microsoft is bundling an online service with their next Windows release that will make Internet access cheap and easy. In a single year, the number of public access dial-up providers jumped from 80 to 290. Electronic commerce is picking up strongly now that industry is on the verge of establishing a security standard. Internet service providers, software manufacturers and hardware servers dominate the news in personal computing these days as manufacturers play to the public's interest in the Net. It's time to wire your computer to the Internet and begin exploring its many resources.

You will need the Internet to communicate effectively in the five years remaining of the 20th century. Access to the Net will provide you with mail service to millions of people all around the world. It will dish up news before you can read about it in the paper. It will provide you with access to thousands of files on just about every topic under the sun. All are indexed and ready to read or download at lightening speed. A connection will let you set up electronic traps to capture new files that are of specific interest to you. You can also put out data on the Net for others to view. Some of that data can be presented as infomercials to

help you sell your product. The Internet and its sophisticated relative, the World Wide Web, provides a leveling field where small entities can successfully compete with larger ones. Some of the most compelling ads I have seen on the Net are by small hunting and fishing lodges in Alaska. The ads are so compelling that I almost pull out my credit card every time I see them.

The Louisiana State part of the Internet is LaNet. Louisiana Net links university campuses, libraries, schools, and government agencies throughout Louisiana. A pilot program called Info Louisiana was recently completed by 13 state government departments. You can now find information on most state departments including the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, where a wealth of tourist information is collected. Info Louisiana makes tourist information available to everybody on the Internet.

I developed and wrote the Internet Web Home Page for the Office of Tourism. In the process I had to master the HTML editor that is used to turn text, graphics, photos, and sound into files that can be viewed over the Internet. I found that it was remarkably easy to write Web documents. My talk today will focus on the nuts and bolts issues of how to create a Web document, and we will then look at Info Louisiana. Remember, it's easy. After my brief talk, we'll take you on a trip through the tourism home page, and we'll search for information on Cajun Country.

The goal of the tourism Web document is to attract more visitors to Louisiana so they can contribute to our state's economy. The idea is to provide potential visitors with compelling reasons to visit. To do this we include detailed information to help potential visitors determine where to go, where to stay, and what to do in Louisiana. I begged a piece of the Division of Administration's server to hold the project. They have a super fast Internet line called the T1 that operates at 1.5 million baud or about 52 times faster than the speediest dial-up modem currently in use. I needed a fast

line so I could quickly send complex Web documents with lots of color pictures, sound, and eventually, video to people visiting the tourism Web site.

I downloaded a free copy of the HTML text editor used to format documents for the World Wide Web. HTML stands for Hyper-Text Mark-up Language, and there are many free editors available. Many word processing programs plan to have HTML editor options and, as HTML becomes the dominant language of the Information Age, all of the successful word processing packages will bundle HTML editors. The HTML editor works just like a word processing program. You mark headings, lists, menu items, and body text. Next you mark where the editor should insert graphics, photos, sound, and video. The editor worked well and made it easy to link text to index entries and bring in photos, graphics, and sound.

The basic components of the HTML file suite are common ASCII files available as a conversion option on all DOS and Windows word processing programs. Graphics and photos need to be converted to the CompuServe Graphics Standard GIF Format. We sent slides out to a service agency where they were scanned under Kodak CD format for 90 cents each, and we used Corel Draw to convert the Kodak CD images to GIF files. There are several public domain programs including one I used called L-View that help with conversion and with editing GIF files. Sounds are available as common Windows wave files. Even video can be transferred over the Internet and many organizations are now using the Internet for teleconferencing. Public Broadcasting is bringing up video on Info Louisiana, and tourism will follow as soon as Public Broadcasting works out all the bugs.

It took me about four hours to become comfortable with the HTML editor, and it would take about that same time for a competent word processor or computer competent secretary to master the language. It isn't rocket science and is surprisingly intuitive.

Once I mastered the HTML editor, I had to determine what to create with it. We held meetings to determine what information to put on the tourism server. We decided to start out with a text and listings in the Travel Guide. I broke the text up into five tourist regions - Sportsman's Paradise in the north, Crossroads in the middle of Louisiana, Cajun Country in the southwest, Plantation Country up and down the levee around Baton Rouge, and Greater New Orleans. Each section was set up as a separate document and illustrated with carefully selected photos. Since image is everything when you are wooing visitors, pictures were selected to create an immediate, "I want to be there now" impression on viewers.

The Web can display images at extremely high resolution, so that good pictures enhance Web documents on the screen. A table of contents on the home, or first page, of the tourism Web document was linked to the appropriate sections using a function called hypertext. These linked text references are blue so that people familiar with the Web always know to click on the blue entries that interest them. The entries then open up and display associated text and graphics. When you click on a hypertext index entry "Cajun Country," you get several pages of text and photos that provide information on what to do and see in that part of Louisiana. There are links in the Cajun document to a history of the Cajun people, and listings for hotels, restaurants, bed and breakfasts, attractions, and other features of interest to tourists. This format is followed through the other four regions with each linked to an index item on the Tourism Home Page.

The Quarterly Calendar of Events, also included in the tourism Web document, will be updated every three months. Users pick the month, and view page after page of events with dates, a contact person, and a telephone number for additional information. The Welcome Centers are included along with a map showing where each is located. Each Convention and Visitor Bureau is listed with a contact name and phone number. The climate page has a cool hypertext link to a weather service at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. The link returns detailed weather projections for the larger towns in Louisiana and colorful maps of

weather patterns developed from satellite imagery. The data is updated on the University of Illinois server every couple of hours, as new information becomes available.

We plan to place some other tourism literature on our home page. I am now formatting the *Our Culture Abounds* brochure, and *Music Trail* information. We are also studying ways to get the detailed state map on the Internet. I worked with State Parks during the past month to complete their home page. They now have an Internet home page that includes an electronic copy of each of their brochures, complete with photos of each park and commemorative area. The State Parks data complements the more general tourism information.

I was delighted to find that the tourism home page is the most visited site on Info Louisiana with some 20,000 hits a month. We are now counting calls from the toll free number on the tourism home page to determine how many leads it generates and have a temporary E-mail address via America On Line to capture electronic information requests.

Where is the Internet going? Lets call it the "Next Net." Those who envision the evolution of the Internet describe information appliances that include a television, computer, and phone all in one unit. This unit would be hooked to a fiber optic phone line or TV cable to provide a full range of data including text, video, and sound for new applications like video conferencing and interactive movies. The new systems will provide very fast downloading and immediate, wait free access to complex Web documents that combine text, photos, graphics, sound, and video. Most emphasis is now focused on developing the telecommunications technology to move greater chunks of data at higher speeds. Applications will spring from that technology once it is in place.

Digital democracy may be one application. Once we're all wired up and can vote via the Internet, politics could be conducted on line, and every voice could be heard and every opinion counted. Soon we might issue a couch potato vote right from the comfort of our own homes through the Internet. Rush Limbaugh has a published Internet address, so does Al

Gore. Both Republicans and Democrats agree that the Internet or Information Super Highway, as it is often called, is a really good idea. Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich both strongly support improvement in the maintenance of the highway. This bipartisan support should result in federal efforts to improve the Internet infrastructure.

Some envision electronic town meetings and virtual communities, linked by the Internet. Commerce and business will shift from offices and malls to networks and modems. Others argue that no online data base will ever replace your newspaper. No CD Rom will ever take the place of a competent teacher, and no network will change the way government works. These detractors also point out that online business is coming up a bit short. A review of businesses on the Internet found that many had made no sales after three to six months on the Net. Your local mall does more business in an afternoon than the Internet does in a month, largely because there's been no secure way to send money over the Net. But, as Ross has told you, Microsoft has very recently figured out an encryption algorithm which may, in fact, mean there will be a possibility of sending money over the Internet.

Regardless, some states are really investing in the Net by improving the infrastructure it runs over. Iowa may be the leader with their recently founded Iowa Communications Network. The Iowa state government has laid 3,000 miles of fiber optic cable to form the backbone of the Iowa Communications Network. That cable is capable of supporting two way video conferencing and very fast data transfer rates. Fiber optic cable will support World Wide Web browsing at the fastest speed available. It will transfer complex graphics, videos, and sound for communication and information systems that are not even available yet.

The phrase "information is power" was coined in the last half of the 20th century. Now on the cusp of the 21st century, that phrase needs to be modified to "fast access to information is power". Iowa is guided by that notion. Their fiber optic infrastructure is already attracting new business and is a fine "carrot" to hold out to business relocating from

communications impoverished parts of the country. Farsighted ventures like Iowa's Communications Network will assure future prosperity for that state.

Where is Louisiana in this process? Well, for starters, Louisiana beat out precocious Iowa two years ago for a seed grant to bring universities on line to the Internet. Iowa was told by 7 of the 10 judges who selected LSU that they needed to develop a system more like Louisiana's. Since then every main parish library has been hooked up by the Louisiana Library Network project. Each has a public access Internet connection. You can surf the Internet from the main library branch in each of your parishes. Thirteen Louisiana state departments have authored Web documents and placed them on the Internet through the pilot Info Louisiana project. The entire state university system is connected to the Internet via LOUIS, the Louisiana Online University Information System. Each student at LSU gets an Internet address for mail and file transfer. Nineteen of our K-12 schools have Internet connections. The Department of Education is now in the process of providing Internet access to 60 vo-tech schools and 20 school districts. Louisiana is on the cutting edge of information technology and riding fast down the information highway. We are way ahead of most other states, and many have contacted us for information to help them develop their own networks.

Many of you are probably wondering how to get on the Internet. America on Line, Prodigy, CompuServe, MCI Mail, Delphi, and a hundred other dial-up services provide Internet access for \$10-20 per month. All offer Internet gateways and addresses. The services let you do E-mail, File Transfer, Network News Reading, and Gopher/Veronica searches. They also have a dial-up help list to assist users. A few include Web browsers, with quick 28,800 baud rates, so Web surfing on the dial-up services is now possible. Text-only browsers are also becoming available, making text-only information on the World Wide Web available on the slower dial-up services as well. However, even the relatively fast 28,000 baud systems are too slow for the most sophisticated systems with finely detailed graphics and video. These systems, available for about

\$100, employ data compression to obtain actual transfer rates of 56,000 baud. For example, the National Census Data Center transmits TIGER file maps that resolve down to the census block level, but each new screen load of map information takes 15-30 minutes to load over the dial-up services. Fortunately, there is plenty of bandwidth on TV cable and fiber optic phone lines. Use of these technologies for Internet access may remove the current technology barriers to significantly higher baud rates and faster informational retrieval.

What do you do if you want to bring up a home page on the fully graphic Web portion of the Internet now? The simplest answer is to use a service agency. It can help you author a Web document and have a sophisticated presence on the Internet although you don't have the budget for a server, staff, and a lease line. There are a number of suppliers who will construct your Web document, and then place it on the Web for a monthly fee far below common lease line fees. Responses to your Web document can be taken by phone and be routed to your dial-up service electronic post office. Using a service agency also provides security. You take no chance that somebody will hack through the file log security protection on your computer and trash your server. The service agency takes all that liability.

If you decide to do this alone, you will need a server, software, a staff member to write HTML code, and a lease line. The server costs \$5,000-7,000 (with software included). The lease line runs around \$100-150 a month, plus usage. Availability varies considerably for lease lines, but ISDN lines that run at a perfectly adequate 128,000 baud are available in most places.

Think carefully before putting lots of information in your Web document that must be periodically updated. The bright users of the Internet will send derogatory messages if you transmit inaccurate information. They will also discount all of your remaining information if they note mistakes. Use unchanging static information whenever possible. Make sure you have the staff and the necessary office discipline and time before including information that requires frequent updates. This will also apply to those of you who choose to use a

service agency, because they will charge you for expensive programming every time you make a change. Careful planning in the development phase will assure a smooth running Web presence.

I assume that many of you will have a home page on the World Wide Web at some point in the near future because you will need an Internet presence to reach your target market in the 21st century. As the Internet savvy students of today become the consumers of travel tomorrow, they will expect to find travel information on line. If you don't advertise on line, these travelers will not find you. You need to prepare for their information access expectations by developing your own home page on the Internet. Your pages will get even play time with the largest corporations. The Internet search routines level the playing field. They return an entry for a mom and pop shop right next to a major hotel. In that respect they are the perfect vehicle for marketing small, rural enterprises.

1995 SUCCESS STORIES

Find the Key to Unity

Columbia— The Little Town That Could

By Kay LaFrance, Columbia Downtown Projects

Columbia was once known as the village of happy homes on the Ouachita River. The sleepy little steamboat town nestled on the banks of the Ouachita River, the seat of Caldwell Parish, once had everything every small town needed. But the river that brought Columbia to life almost killed it.

Columbia's heyday came and went with the steam-powered riverboats that carried goods and passengers up and down the river from the mid-1800s into the early years of the present century. The bustling river traffic supported a healthy downtown business district filled with hotels, shops and saloons. In 1927 a flood put the whole town under about three feet of water. By then, the railroad had replaced the riverboat, and oil and natural gas, which had been discovered nearby, quickly replaced the river as Columbia's economic lifeblood.

When a massive levee system was built, people literally turned their backs on the river. The highway that had rolled down Columbia's Main Street was rerouted a few blocks west and connected to a new bridge. The business district disintegrated. Downtown Columbia was left behind.

It took a few more decades and another flood to regenerate the town's current interest in the river. The levee held back record level flood waters in the spring of 1991, but for weeks, seepage and sand boils throughout town caused Mayor Jim Sherman to lie awake many nights. Although the water level dropped before any serious injury was done, the receding water took a big chunk of the levee with it. The mayor knew that another year of high water would be disastrous.

Mayor Sherman and members of the Caldwell Parish Industrial Development Board finally found help from U.S. Sen. J. Bennett Johnston, who pushed through emergency federal legislation that resulted in this summer's \$2.1 million U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project to shore up the 1,600 feet of damaged levee. A scenic riverwalk at the end of Main Street is now in the planning stages to enhance appreciation of the river, which is a large part of the community's heritage.

Although the actual levee repair project only took two months to complete, it required over two years of planning. During that time, the Town of Columbia, the Caldwell Parish Industrial Development Board, the Chamber of Commerce, and many interested citizens put together a plan to revive the historic blocks of buildings that were once the heart of commerce. The Main Street concept of pairing historic preservation with economic revitalization seemed the obvious road to follow. But, there was much work to be done before actual application could be made to

become an "official" Main Street Town recognized by the state Office of Historic Preservation.

One of our first successes was the restoration of the Schepis Building, an ornate structure built in 1916 as a general store by Italian architect John Schepis. Its demolition was prevented by a grant from the Division of Historic Preservation and matched by the Caldwell Parish Industrial Development Board. This building is now the centerpiece of Columbia's Main Street, known as the Schepis Museum. Just last year, the building had over nine thousand visitors.

Other successes followed, many in previously old, vacant buildings: Magnolia's Antiques, the Wisteria Tea Garden, the Watermark Saloon (the oldest saloon on the Ouachita), a medical office, a beauty shop, and the restoration of the Council on Aging office to its original grandeur.

One of the proudest successes literally involves a cornerstone of Main Street — Caldwell Bank and Trust Company. Two years ago a plan to remodel the bank included a proposal to demolish two of the original Main Street buildings adjoining the bank to create a drive-through. The town's new dedication to preserving the past, coupled with the bank's desire to work with the community on the Main Street concept led to a revision in the remodeling plan to include those two buildings. In addition, more than a half-block of old buildings in the historic district were saved. The bank had purchased the half-block and planned to demolish the buildings for a new parking lot. Other parking alternatives have now been made and those buildings are undergoing renovations for new tenants. By November 1, downtown Columbia will have five new businesses in its historic Main Street district.

Perhaps the first real visible sign of progress was this summer's dedication of Main Street Memory Lane. Forty-five antique-style streetlights were purchased by private citizens in honor of loved ones. These line some of the downtown streets. The town matched a state grant to pay for installation, wiring, sidewalk alterations and the removal of existing telephone and electrical utility poles from the streets.

The rediscovered pride in our community is evident in some parish residents, who are literally tooting their horns as members of the newly-formed Riverside Concert Band! This 50-member group has already given five concerts, and they perform at our festivals and celebrations whenever needed. They were even invited to perform at the annual Spring Pilgrimage in Natchez!

Our efforts have been even more fruitful since July when we were notified that Columbia is now recognized by the state as an "official" Main Street Town. A team from Baton Rouge recently spent three intense days with our community and new Main Street Board of Directors, training us to use the program to continue development in Columbia. We can now begin to work on plans such as adopt-a-block for beautification and design, surveys and promotional ideas to help our downtown merchants. The positive attitude has become contagious.

What's on the horizon? A former Columbia resident has committed to build a 19-room inn on a vacant lot across the street from the Schepis Museum. The three-story building,

designed to fit in with Columbia's historic character, will have space for retail shops while providing needed overnight accommodations. Construction should begin early next year. The Levee Board has agreed to build a set of steps from the top of the levee to the river's edge for better access. A local architect and engineer have designed a scenic overlook, staging area, and dock which will be visible from Highway 165 on the Ouachita River Bridge, coming into Columbia. We're now seeking funding for the project. Past experiences indicate that these dreams, too, will become reality.

Perseverance, cooperation, and determination by many progressive-minded citizens to bring our town back to life has resulted in this particular success story. Just like that little engine that kept saying, "I think I can, I think I can..." Columbia now knows it can- because it has, and will continue to succeed.

One Person Band

By Virgie Ott, Tourism Coordinator, City of Gretna

I would like to tell you that I am a "One Person Band," but I am not! To successfully serve as tourism coordinator for the City of Gretna, I depend upon the entire community of Gretna. This 3.5 square mile city got its beginning in 1836. Today it is a thriving community of 17,208, only ten minutes from downtown New Orleans.

My love for Gretna was fostered by my husband, Ed, and our mayor, Ronnie Harris. Gretna is Ed's hometown and his passion for preserving its past involved us with the Gretna Historical Society. Our mayor, Ronnie Harris, was president of the Gretna Historical Society when I met him. From these two people and the Gretna Historical Society members, numerous projects were born to promote Gretna's history, like the restoration of the Southern Pacific Depot to house the visitor center; the restoration of the Kittie Strehle Home, the only furnished Creole Cottage in the New Orleans area; and the creation of a fire museum inside the firehouse of David Crockett Fire Company No. 1. The company is the oldest, continuously active volunteer fire company in the United States. Our fire museum is now designated as the Louisiana State Fire Museum. While involved in all of these activities, in 1988, I became executive secretary to Mayor Harris. In 1992, he recognized that I shared his vision for Gretna to become a travel destination and appointed me Gretna's first Tourism Coordinator.

I was then able to dedicate my time to presenting Gretna to the world. Wow! I needed a plan. First, a visitor's guide and brochure were developed and we printed 500 and 5,000 copies, respectively. Presently, I am developing two color brochures, one describing the community overall and one providing directions for a driving tour of Gretna. Printing volume will increase to 100,000 copies, and we will distribute these through the State Welcome Centers and by a private entity. This process must be working because an increasing number of people are arriving on my doorstep.

As a charter member of the Gretna Economic Development Association, I was involved in securing a grant from the local utility company to purchase equipment and develop a slide show that is used to promote the city. The association was also successful in securing a grant to plant trees on Gretna Boulevard. This project inspired other organizations to do the same.

We are adding attractions through the efforts of many groups. The German Heritage, Cultural and Genealogical Society was formed in order to make application to the National Park Service to house the Germanic American Cultural Center in Gretna. Restoration is near completion and we are looking forward to an early-1996 opening. A group of railroad buffs organized the Louisiana State Railroad Museum, which will open this year in the old Texas Pacific Depot. A local gun shop, the oldest family owned gun shop in the state, has added a minimilitary museum. All of these efforts should bring additional visitors to Gretna.

Activities throughout the year include the Gretna Heritage Festival, Collector's Fest, a St. Joseph Day Altar, Spring Tour of Homes, Mardi Gras, an enthusiastic Veteran's Day Program, and the city's Christmas Tree Lighting and Caroling.

Familiarization (FAM) Tours have become an exciting way to bring people to Gretna. Two were implemented last year to entice the tour operators of the metropolitan New Orleans area, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette to visit historic Gretna. Last month, we welcomed the State Travel Counselors, and we will welcome the travel professionals from the 1996 Louisiana Travel Summit in January.

Loving Gretna is easy, but knowing the tourism trade takes practice. Since becoming tourism coordinator, I have attended many educational seminars through Louisiana Sea Grant, the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, and the Louisiana Travel Promotion Association. I have earned a certificate as a Louisiana Tour Escort and qualified for a New Orleans tour guide license. I am working on adding the letters LCTP behind my name. The tour guide license allows me to accompany buses from New Orleans to Gretna and gives me a better insight into New Orleans history.

After working with the communities of Westwego and Lafitte to put the West Bank FAM together, we have decided to cooperatively produce a brochure. We are also going to join with other areas of the West Bank for a cooperative ad in the 1996 Louisiana Tour Guide.

Although this summary of my accomplishments demonstrates Gretna's progress, I know there is much more to be done. Our community has just begun to toot our horn.

Neighbors Tie Assets Together
Great River Road Plantation Parade Association
By Zeb Mayhew, Jr., Oak Alley Plantation, Vacherie, La.

When I came to the River Road in 1976 as administrative director of Oak Alley Plantation, very little in the way of tourism existed between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Very early in my efforts to promote Oak Alley, I saw the need for pooling resources to market the plantation along the River Road as a destination. The initial problems I confronted were a high sense of competitiveness between the plantations and a fear that a cooperative effort would reduce individual market share. Unable to afford a marketing program that could achieve any real impact, I was frustrated to see a publication such as *This Week In New Orleans*, with over seven pages of individual advertisements for River Road attractions distributed throughout the publication, all screaming, "Come see me!" There was nothing in that method of advertising to help visitors understand our relatively close locations or recommend an efficient way to visit all or many of us. Most frustrating was a lack of willingness to combine all of those separate plantation ads into one double truck ad that would cost each plantation much less money than we were spending and would turn us into a tour destination.

Almost 10 years later, two events associated with the 1984 World's Fair stimulated the cooperative effort that would become known as the Great River Road Plantation Parade Association. First, the *World's Fair Visitor's Guide* was being coordinated by the Louisiana Travel Promotion Association, the State Office of Tourism, and the Louisiana World Exposition, Inc. Because the proposed distribution was 1,500,000 copies, every tourism promoter sought to be included in this hot promotional piece. The relatively high cost of ads that would achieve an impact in this promotional book led me to once again approach the other plantations about coping a destination ad. It would include a map that would show our relative locations between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Although only Nottoway, Oak Alley and San Francisco plantations participated in the promotion, our full page ad proved to be quite successful and cost effective.

Second, the March 1984 issue of *Southern Living* featured "Louisiana's River Plantations," a ten-page article covering thirteen plantation homes from St. Francisville to New Orleans. It was full of the glorious photographs that magazine is known for, and it had a map! Visitors came in droves to the River Road with that issue of *Southern Living* in their hands during the Fair and for months afterward, even years. That one article finally convinced everyone of the potential for cooperative destination marketing.

Soon after the World's Fair, we began the process of creating our first Plantation Parade brochure. In this process, we learned some lessons that have been crucial to the survival of our association. Initially, we had to develop a lot of trust in one another and believe in the concept of cooperative destination marketing. There had to be a long term commitment to pooling our resources (both human and financial) and marketing our assets together in the belief that we would get more cooperatively than with individual investments. We learned to be patient and to

compromise. For example, it took time to select artwork for a generic cover, layout, copy, map, that was satisfactory to everyone in the group. From the beginning we learned that our resolve would be tested whenever we were called upon individually to take our lumps from the kinds of mistakes that are inherent in producing printed materials. Case in point, the first printing of our brochure has a very serious error on the map. The placement of the number identifying Oak Alley Plantation was on the wrong side of the river and we had printed 100,000 copies which were expected to last a year!

This first brochure also taught us the importance of having a homogeneous and compatible group. In the beginning, our association consisted of six plantations and four restaurants that were housed in historic buildings along the River Road. We first found that the features important to a brochure for plantations and restaurants were not compatible. Changes in business activity affected the brochures, too. Today, our association consists of the core group of six plantations and one restaurant that have survived these past ten years.

It hasn't been easy to hold our group together, and we continue to have our problems. Nevertheless, it is quite easy to see that cooperative destination marketing is cost effective and produces results. The proof is in numbers. We have all continued to experience success with record numbers of visitors each year, and I am convinced that this success is the direct result of our Plantation Parade marketing program.

Cheaper by the Dozen: St. Francisville Overnight!

By Madeline Noland Nevill, Green Springs Plantation Bed & Breakfast, St. Francisville

The St. Francisville Overnight is a loose organization of owners and operators of overnight accommodations in West Feliciana Parish providing lodging space for tourists who come to the area. The name "St. Francisville" was chosen for its recognition factor, which the name "Feliciana", though perhaps more poetic, does not possess.

The name "Feliciana" means "Happy Land." It was given to the area by the early Spanish settlers because of the prosperity they experienced in this area, characterized by beautiful hills and ravines covered with a mixed hardwood forest of oak, magnolia, hickory, poplar, and beech, and an understory of dogwood, redbud, and wild ferns. Those early families had a propensity for building fine houses and gardens, many of which are still standing today, due perhaps to the absence of any significant change during the 20th century.

Pilgrims have come to St. Francisville for many years to enjoy these beauties. As long as I can remember (since the 1930s), Afton Villa, which was across the fence from my grandparents' house where I grew up, took in visitors for tours. Rosedown, Greenwood, the Myrtles, the Cottage and Grace Church were also open for pilgrims.

Although there were a couple of hotels in town in those early years, I presume many visitors made day trips from nearby or stayed in Natchez or Baton Rouge. The Barrow House began operations in 1986; the Cottage Plantation began taking overnight guests in the early 1960s; the Holiday Inn opened on Hwy. 61 in 1974; the Myrtles began taking guests in 1981, and the St. Francisville Inn, in 1983. During the nineties, Butler Greenwood, Rosedown, the Bluffs on Thompson Creek, Lake Rosemound Inn, the Shade Tree, and my place, Green Springs Bed and Breakfast opened.

A 2% local lodging tax, collected by establishments offering overnight accommodations, was imposed in 1987 and dedicated to financing the tourist commission, whose job it was to promote more tourism. When an additional 1% tax was proposed, making a total of 11% to be collected from our visitors, some proprietors felt an imposition was being placed upon those whose duty it was to collect the tax. Meetings were called to discuss and perhaps protest this action.

Because these initial meetings brought to our attention the many things we have in common, they resulted in our incorporation, and monthly meetings began. Since a variety of types of accommodations are available in St. Francisville, we chose to be identified as St. Francisville Overnight! instead of Bed and Breakfast. This identity is inclusive rather than exclusive; the benefits of membership can extend to all with the goal of raising standards for the area's whole accommodation industry.

The association's first accomplishment was production of a brochure, primarily a list of names and telephone numbers with a brief description of each property. Next, we were chosen to host the second annual meeting of the Louisiana Bed and Breakfast Association. St. Francisville had, at that time, more B&Bs than any area of the state, except New Orleans. (Several of our members were active in the formation of the Louisiana Bed and Breakfast Association.)

We have found it beneficial to cooperate in advertising. The best example is a one-page advertisement in the Louisiana Tour Guide published by the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism and the Louisiana Travel Promotion Association. One million of these are distributed by the state in response to the state advertising program. We also advertise in the *St. Francisville Democrat*, and *Country Roads*, which is a local news sheet. We had an ad in *Gambit* in New Orleans, and are currently advertising in *In Register*, the Baton Rouge Junior League magazine.

Our most effective cooperative effort grew out of an informal effort to refer excess reservation requests to others in the association, when we fill to capacity. At the beginning of each week, one of the group surveys all members to find which facilities have open rooms for the following weekend; then they report that to the town's tourism information office. They also pass the information along to the members, so that a customer can secure accommodations without making multiple telephone calls. If the contacted association member has no vacancy, he or she will offer to make the reservations with one who does. This courtesy provides service to the tourist seeking accommodations, the other B&Bs, and benefits the community.

Other areas of cooperation are under

consideration such as a common telephone number and direct mail advertising. We have saved money by advertising and working together — kind of cheaper by the dozen. But in the process, we have found the cooperation between members is so beneficial that our slogan could be "One for all and all for one."

“I Can’t Say No” Volunteerism

Ed Kelley, Cameron Parish Tourist Commission

Prior to 1986, I served on the economic advisory committee of the County Agent of Cameron Parish. When the offshore oil business in Cameron Parish took a sharp decline, we began searching for new ways to improve the parish’s economy. Tourism appeared to be our best bet for economic improvement.

Taking the first step in developing tourism, we reviewed our natural assets and decided our 36 miles of accessible beaches were among our better prospects for developing tourism. A three day meeting at Rockefeller Refuge, in Grand Chenier, with Mike Liffmann of Louisiana Sea Grant, Villiere Reggio of Minerals Management Service, officials from the Southwest Louisiana Tourist and Convention Bureau, state tourism officials, and parish officials was used to develop an action plan. After on-site inspections of the beaches, it was decided that they needed to be cleaned. I was asked to coordinate a beach clean-up of all Cameron Parish beaches. Through efforts at our disposal, we had 1500 people involved in this first beach clean-up, and we have had similar numbers of volunteers each year since then.

Continuing to work with Sea Grant, we formed our first tourism commission in Cameron Parish. I was privileged to serve as the first chairman and have been serving as secretary since that time. The variety of my volunteer activities seem to fit together for the advancement of tourism. For example, I am chairing a committee on the tourism commission for restoring the grave site from the Civil War battle of Calcasieu Pass. Hopefully, this will be turned into a tourism asset — a park. Being on the executive board of the Calcasieu Regional Planning and Development Commission, I was able to secure funding through the state REDA program to develop and print tourist-related brochures and maps of Cameron Parish at no cost to the parish. About three years ago, I accompanied Mike Liffmann and Steve Henning, both from LSU, to Washington, D.C., to help U.S. senators and representatives understand the needs of Cameron Parish. I have worked with Paul Coreil, former county agent in Cameron Parish, in forming the first Chamber of Commerce in the parish, and, for the past three years, I have served as treasurer of this organization. Chambers of Commerce, as you know, are important to tourism development. As a member of the West Cameron Parish Port Commission, I worked to acquire 159 acres of property, formerly owned by the U.S. Coast Guard. This is to be developed for commercial and tourist purposes. I am on the economic committee of West Cameron Port Commission and, at present, working on getting a dock site for ocean vessels in Hackberry, Louisiana.

In addition, I teach Sunday School and am chairman of the board of Wakefield Methodist Church. At 75 years old, I fully agree with Mike Liffmann that those of us who are retired or semi-retired represent a potential to be tapped to do things for our respective communities.

**Multiple Uses for Community Asset:
Byerley House Community and Visitor Information Center**
By Paul Rosenzweig, President, Doorway to Louisiana, Inc., Lake Providence

Doorway to Louisiana, Inc. evolved out of a larger group established to "do something for Lake Providence." During the late 1960s and early 70s, a large portion of the business section of the town was burned by arsonists. Public spirit was almost non-existent, business was poor, and investments had ceased. Something had to be done. The group established a steering committee to define a purpose, devise goals, and take action, beginning with a massive clean up program. After a successful clean up, a search began for something more tangible and permanent — a building that would be suitable for a community center.

Word spread and the group was offered a turn-of-the-century house that was slated for demolition, with the stipulation that the house be moved from its original site. The house, actually an important part of Lake Providence's history, had been the lifelong home of one of our most colorful citizens, Frank Byerley. He was a pioneer aviator in World War I, a bush pilot in Alaska, and a pilot for the Detroit News. A very desirable piece of property located on the corner of Lake and Ingram streets was offered and readily accepted. Through the group's efforts, the funds were eventually raised to move the house to its present location at 600 Lake Street. Then, under the sponsorship of the East Carroll Parish Police Jury, repairs and renovations were accomplished by volunteer inmate labor from the East Carroll Parish Prison Farm, along with numerous volunteers from the community. After 3 1/2 years from donation to restoration, we were able to open to the public on June 29, 1993. At this time, this building became known as The Byerley House Community and Visitor Information Center. Now, officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the building also houses the Chamber of Commerce. In 1994, the house became an official tourist information center, with financial aid from the state. This was a tremendous help with operational expenses.

The first public function held there, a political rally, has been followed by many wedding receptions, luncheons, workshops, class reunions, art exhibits, musical concerts, teas, anniversary parties, etc. It is truly a community center. Tourists were slow to come in the beginning. This was primarily because we did not have proper signs indicating that it was, indeed, an information center. But, that has changed markedly in recent months. Because a visit to the center is almost like being a guest in someone's private home, we often hear remarks such as, "This reminds me of my grandmother's house".

Attendance has steadily increased. In the last six months in 1993, 1,372 visitors signed our guest register. In 1994, 5,034 signed, and through July of this year, 5,572. July had the best attendance of all with 1,881 visitors; 58 of those from foreign countries. So far this year, 14 foreign countries have been represented, as well as four Canadian provinces.

We now have one full-time and one part-time employee, while volunteers serve at the desk on Wednesdays and on weekends. Our hours are 9-5 Monday through Saturday and 1-5 on Sunday.

In addition to the beautiful house site, our group owns a sizable stretch of lake bank on the most beautiful lake in Louisiana. We recently completed a 285-foot pier that provides visitors with a wonderful view of the lake and Grant's Canal. Plans are ready for a nature walk among the cypress trees along the bank. Picnic tables and playground equipment are already in place.

We do not have any formal data to demonstrate the economic impact these group efforts have had on our town of Lake Providence; but, we sincerely believe that the establishment of Byerley House was the beginning of something that will continue to grow and improve the image and economy of this corner of Northeast Louisiana.