

In and about Washington

March 2025
FREE—TAKE ONE



Board votes to close Washington Elementary

The parish school board voted 11-2 February 13 to close Washington Elementary at the end of this school year and send its 122 students to Plaisance, Grand Prairie, Port Barre, and Palmetto. Board president Bianca Vedell and member Raymond Cassimire voted to keep the school open.

Parents, teachers, and community leaders vigorously protested the closure, but to no avail. Some talked of a legal challenge to the closing.

Superintendent Milton Batiste has argued that students will be better served at schools where teachers teach only one subject or grade.

Washington principal Kyle Sylvester responded bluntly, "Our kids are not going to be better off, so let's not create that narrative."

The school staff has done everything asked of it to stay open, according to Cassimire. Vedell warned that "the northern end of the parish is not prepared to withstand the loss of another community school." She said closure made no sense "with no plan for the area it feeds to."

Washington Elementary has been cited as one of the state's most improved schools in recent years. When closure was first discussed, mayor Dwight Landreneau proposed increasing Washington's enrollment by bringing back seventh- and eighth-grade students who were moved several years ago to bolster enrollment at North Central High in Lebeau.

The closure here and consolidation of schools in Opelousas and Eunice come after a study found that parishwide population and school enrollment have been falling, causing financial strain across the system.

Washington residents protested that students in Opelousas and Eunice will be sent to other schools within their own communities where failing schools are staying open, but the closure here will disperse young children from an improving school to other towns. They argued that many parents here don't have adequate transportation to reach their children in case of emergency.

Community fest brings visitors

In just a few years, the Washington Community Festival, set this year for March 22 at the Town Pavilion, has become one of the town's top three events, according to a new study.

Fall and Spring antique fairs at the Old High School Antique Mall top the list.

Headliners at the March 22 festival will be Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys and Don Fontenot et Les Amis De La Louisiane. There will also be a Cajun/Creole jam session with Mark Ardoin. A plant sale by the Washington Garden Club will be added this year to the food, drink, and crafts on sale.

Vintage and classic cars and trucks will again be on display. For car show registration contact Greg Doucet, (337) 945-1531, or Ricky Ducote, (337) 945-3426. Food and merchandise vendors should call Town Hall, (337) 826-3626.

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Of Note

ASH WEDNESDAY Masses, March 5, will be at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. at Immaculate Conception and at noon at Holy Trinity. The Way of the Cross will be held on Fridays in Lent at Immaculate Conception starting with Mass at 5:30 p.m. and ending with the stations of the cross.

WASHINGTON BAPTIST hosts a youth program each Wednesday at 6 p.m.

THE AMERICAN LEGION is still asking for donations to help repair the legion home. Send them to American Legion Post 209, P.O. Box 45, Washington 70589.



Old Courtableau open again

The Old Courtableau Café on Main Street reopened February 12, offering lunches, sandwiches, and salads each Tuesday through Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Coby Dupre, Peggy Allemand, and Tamika Roberts prepare the meals.

Antique Fair next month

The spring Antique Fair and Yard Sale will be April 11-14 at the Old Schoolhouse Antique Mall. Vendors who want to register for the sale should call (337) 826-3580.

Scholarships will again be offered

The Steamboat City Association will again offer scholarships for graduating high school seniors from Washington and nearby who will go to a college, community college or trade school.

Applications are available at St. Landry high schools, Washington Town Hall, or by email from steamboatcityassociation@gmail.com. Send completed applications by midnight June 30 to Steamboat City Association, Scholarship Committee, P O Box 218, Washington, LA 70589.

It was even colder

Preliminary data from the St. Landry airport showed a record low temperature of 3 degrees during the big freeze on January 22. The final report from the Lake Charles weather office says it was 2 degrees.

Mild weather is forecast for March with average rainfall.

WASHINGTON WEATHER

February 1-27

High: 82, Feb. 9

Avg. High: 63.0

Low: 24, Feb. 21

Avg. Low: 45.3

Avg. Temp: 54.1

5-year Avg. 54.4

Feb. Rainfall: 3.94

Avg. for Feb.: 4.73

Rain for 2025: 7.74

20-year Avg.: 8.63

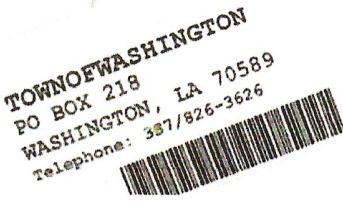


Student arts expo March 29

The St. Landry Parish Student Arts Expo will be held on Saturday, March 29, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the St. Landry Parish Courthouse Square. The event features performances by school bands, choirs, and performance classes, art exhibits, and a student artist market offering original artwork and crafts.

Two ordinances deal with utilities

The Town Council has adopted two ordinances designed to make sure that the utility system is run so that it can provide good service and be properly maintained, but only at a cost needed to do so.



The first of them gives the council the ability to keep utility rates just above the cost of operations. It calls for review of rates twice a year with the dual objectives of making sure that the system does not lose money, but also avoids sudden, large rate increases.

The ordinance requires that each of the town's utilities services – gas, water, and sewer – makes at least 1.15 percent above the actual cost of operation. The last audit of town finances showed that the gas and water utilities each made a small profit, but the sewer system had a deficit.

The ordinance does not change the current rates, but an increase in sewer rates is likely. Auditor Burton Kolder noted in January that it costs more to process a gallon of wastewater than it does to produce a gallon of drinking water. He recommended an increase big enough to make the sewer system at least break even.

The ordinance requires that "adjustments shall be made as necessary to maintain the minimum sustainability ratio (1.15 percent) while limiting any increase to no more than 12 percent per year over the current rate.

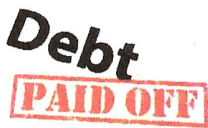
The second ordinance deals with utility fees and deposits and with the terms regulating services to "ensure the ... utility systems are sustainably managed and operated."

It generally updates and codifies current practices, requiring that new customers provide a complete application and pay a deposit, requiring that utility bills be paid in full and on time, and providing for "a comprehensive review of the utility system's fees, deposits, and terms of service during budget preparation."

Debt that nearly bankrupt town all but gone

When Mayor Dwight Landreneau took office in January 2020, audits showed that Washington had outstanding debts of more than \$600,000.

Since then, he has recommended austere budgets, kept a tight grip on spending, negotiated with vendors, sold surplus property, and even used proceeds from yard sales to chip away at that big number, and it worked.



As of February 1, that debt inherited from the past administration is down to \$28,000, and Landreneau thinks that will be paid, or very nearly so, by the end of this fiscal year on June 30.

The Town has show small surpluses over the past several years. An audit showed that the town ended the last fiscal year with a surplus of \$34,513, and the current budget projects a similar small surplus.

From Town Hall

THE TOWN is taking applications to replace assistant police chief Easton Shelvin, who has resigned. The sheriff's department is helping to patrol the town in the interim.

A MEETING planned for February 13 to discuss the Louisiana Main Street program was postponed and will be rescheduled. The national program encourages economic development in towns with historic downtown areas.

UTILITY CUSTOMERS are reminded that bill payments are due on the 17th of each month and that payments received after 3 p.m. are posted on the next business day. A \$10 late fee is charged if the bill is not paid on time.

REGULAR MEETINGS of the Town Council are at 6 p.m. on each third Monday at Town Hall.



**Take pride in your town.
Stash your trash.**

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Ethel Landreneau remembered here

Ethel Landreneau, a Washington matriarch and civic leader, died February 10 at the age of 96. She was a lifelong resident, born here in 1928, the daughter of Joseph and Aliza Stephens Huguet.



She graduated from Washington High in 1945 and received a business education degree from SLI (now ULL) in 1948. She and Justin Curry Landreneau married in 1949 and operated the Landreneau Store here for 25 years. She also worked as the office manager for the People's Moss Gin in Palmetto for 23 years.

She was a trustee of Immaculate Conception Church, where she was a Eucharistic minister, choir member, lector, and president of the altar society. She was also was a founding member of the Washington Garden Club and its treasurer for many years. She was named Washington's Outstanding Civic Leader in 2015.

Her husband died in 1971. Survivors include sons Mayor Dwight Landreneau, John Karl, David Guy, and Charles Roy Landreneau, and a daughter, Julie Anne.

Food and fun bring visitors to Washington

Washington hosted more than 100,000 visitors during 2024, most of them drawn by events such as our festivals and antique sales, according to a high-tech study. That is not 100,000 different people. The number reflects how many times people from at least 10 miles away came to eat, shop, or "pass a good time" in the community.



The data comes from a report generated from an artificial intelligence application called Placer.AI that tracks cell phones.

St. Landry tourism director Herman Fuselier characterized the app as "very in-depth technology [that shows] where visitors come from, the places that they visit, how long they stay, how much money they spend." The greatest number of visitors come from Lafayette, but we also get a good number from Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Houston.

The Steamboat Warehouse restaurant is the town's top attraction according to the report. It is followed by the Old Schoolhouse Antique Mall, Willie's Campground, the Washington Recreation Center, downtown Washington (location of the annual Christmas and community festivals), and the Wolff Banquet and Reception Hall. Mary Hawkins, communications director for the tourism commission pointed out that "the fall antique fair is the most attended event while the spring antique fair saw people traveling in from the farthest locations."

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