Hot August Night coming Friday

BY JACOB RESTER
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Downtown Hammond's restaurants, shops and merchants are preparing for the 19th annual Hot August Night on Friday.

The event will be very similar to those in years past, according to Downtown Development District Director Terry Lynn Smith. The usual Southeastern Louisiana University football pep really, wine tastings, art exhibits and live music are planned.

"The magic of Hot August Night is just that," she said. "No one can believe it's going to be that good because it's hot, but people don't seem to mind on this night as people get here early and stay late."

Mayor Mayson Foster said the goal of Hot August Night is to bring people together, just like the Fourth of July fireworks, Starry November Night, Smokin' Blues and BBQ Cookoff and Police Chili Cookoff.

"It gives people a reason to come downtown in a safe environment," he said. "All those events bring attention to the city, particularly to the downtown area. There are people that come from Baton Rouge, Covington, McComb and some from Metairie that I've had a chance to meet and chat with on the streets."

The activities will begin at 6 p.m. and wrap up at 10 p.m.

Jacob Rester is The Daily Star's metro reporter and gets calls at (985) 254-7835.

Photos by Jacob Rester

NO PARKING WARNINGS ARE UP -- This warning posted by city officials points out people should not park in certain areas of downtown Friday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Closed parking spots and lots will be used for events and merchants.

Fort Polk reports water safe to drink

Associated Press

FORT POLK — Fort Polk officials say an "aggressive and comprehensive" effort is ongoing to ensure the safety and quality of its water supply.

The Town Talk of Alexandria reports that the Army base's announcement comes after testing last year revealed levels of lead and copper that exceeded Environmental Protection Agency Safe Drinking Water standards in some samples of residential tap water at Fort Polk.

In a statement released to The Town Talk this week, Fort Polk officials said American Water, the private company that manages the base's water systems, has taken steps to find the problems and insure they don't happen again.

Lead is a toxin that can have harmful effects if it accumulates in the body, including higher blood pressure in adults and developmental problems in young children. Copper is less concerning, but can cause gastrointestinal distress with short-term exposure and liver or kidney problems with long-term exposure.

In multiple community meetings, letters to residents and the statement released to The Town Talk, Fort Polk officials stressed that the water on the base is safe to drink.

"The Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk is committed to the health and welfare of the community," the statement read. "Stringent measures are in place to ensure the quality of the drinking water on Fort Polk, measures guided by Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals and Environmental Protection Agency mandates. ... Fort Polk will continue to monitor the water systems and implement the necessary measures to maintain the health and safety of our community."

The issue began with a routine test in July 2013 of residential units in North Fort Housing, where more than 3,500 troops and family members live. The test of 20 random residences found that four exceeded the "action level" for lead in the water.

Action level is a threshold at which further testing and a plan of action to address the issue is required.

Battle completes basic military training

Air Force Airman Anthony X. Battle, a 2012 graduate of Hammond High Magnet School, has graduated from basic military training at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, San Antonio, Texas.

The airman completed an intensive, eight-week program that included training in military discipline and studies, Air Force core values, physical fitness, and basic warfare principles and skills.

Airmen who complete basic training earn four credits toward an associate in applied science degree through the Community College of the Air Force.

Students get taste of farm careers in LSU program

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Agriculture students in two Louisiana parishes will be able to earn college credit and credit toward high school graduation with a course called Natural Resources Conservation 1001.

The Louisiana State University College of Agriculture is offering the classes in the rice country of Vermilion Parish and at a school in Livingston Parish, where suburban sprawl from Baton Rouge is slowly overtaking agriculture.

The course will be wide-ranging, including the food chain, erosion issues and how people affect the environment, said teachers Kelly Becnel of Walker High School and Danielle Newsom, who will teach an evening class at the LSU AgCenter extension office in Abbeville for Vermilion Parish students.

The Vermilion course is open to public, private and home-school students.

It's the pilot course in the LSU College of Agriculture's dual-enrollment program and more courses may be added, said Assistant Dean Leslie Blanchard.

VETERANS

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won't be there to bash the Veteran's Administration.

"We will try to work within the system to correct the problems," he said. "I think that's the attitude of most the veterans I've spoken with."

Like many veterans in Tangipahoa Parish, Joseph said he uses the VA office. He said he has no complaints with his experiences at the Hammond office.

"I thank God they're there and hope they never leave," he said.

LaCerte, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, said he is pleased VA officials are finally engaging veterans in a two-way conversation.

"On the state level, I will continue to meet personally with Louisiana veterans so that I can learn about the issues they are facing and will continue to push my federal counterparts to start giving veterans the care they deserve," he said.

CONFERENCE

CONTINUED FROM 1A

different from when her first book was bought in 1988, and over the years, the types of questions she's asked by aspiring authors have changed.

"In the olden days, it was 'how do you get an agent' or 'how do you get published,' but now the industry has changed with indie publishing and self-publishing," she said. "Now authors ask me about how to find readers, build a fan base and longevity. The game has changed."

She was joined by other local authors, and Creative Minds Writer's group members, who put on the conference.

Steve Patrick, who authors mysteries under the name N.S. Patrick, has been a member for about two years and commutes from Kenner to participate in the club's meetings and events.

"Any of these conferences can help and change you as a writer," he said. "You get new ideas and can commiserate with the other authors."

Patrick, 75, started writing full-time after his retirement and has two books published from Silver Knight and another coming out in 2015. He ran a breakout group on how to write a murder mystery.

Group president Nancy Bourgeois said the organization is a great way for area writers, readers and aspiring writers to gather and help each other.

"Because we're such a small group -- about 20 people at any given time -- we can help each other on a personal level."

Some members come from as far as Baton Rouge and Picayune, Mississippi, to participate.

She said attendance, which was at about 60 people mid-morning, was a little low as compared to last year's event, but that will provide more one-on-one time with the authors and writers.

"We're thrilled to have 50 to 70 people," she said. "Because 50-70 people who want to come and learn is better than nothing, and we're going to have a great time."

Sarah Wilson is a Daily Star reporter. She can be reached at 985-254-7830.

Photo by Sarah Wilson

TELL ME MORE - Lynn Shurr, a local romance author, talks about one of her books with 15-year-old aspiring author Bella Saba.

More information about Creative Minds Writers Group can be found at creativemindswriters.com.

SHARK

CONTINUED FROM 1A

foot, so he'll have to rest until it heals, she said. Some of the cuts were deep and wide enough that they would have been aided by stitches, but the family elected not to go that route.

Trent "was kind of freaked out," Trentacosta said. "We decided we'll just wrap them and keep them taped together."

She's still incredulous that her son was bitten by a shark in Lake Pontchartrain, which covers roughly 630 square miles and is popular with swimmers, boaters and fishermen.

"We've been swimming in the lake forever," she said. "You don't think something like that will happen. That was the last thought that crossed my mind."

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