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END OF THE LINE

Some coastal Louisiana camps lost power when their utility pulled out, and others could be next



STAFF PHOTOS BY BRETT DUKE

Jake Sanamo holds up a section of an old electrical line once used to power his family's camp near Lake De Cade in Terrebonne Parish on March 26.

BY SAM KARLIN
Staff writer

ABOARD THE LIL JAKE — Ben Sanamo hunched in the bowels of the tugboat and clutched one end of a garden hose. His dad, Warren, snaked the other end into a 55-gallon drum of diesel and flicked on a portable pump.

The sun fell low in the sky, splashing golden light on their houseboat, the Aqua Lodge, moored next to the tug on the Voss Canal, a waterway cut long ago by fur trappers, deep in the brackish marsh in Terrebonne Parish. No neighbors were home. The swamp was quiet.

The Sanamos pumped the diesel until the drum was dry. Ben cranked the generator, and it sputtered a couple times. "That's the thing with generators," Warren said. "You never know."

Ben cranked it again and it roared to life. The engine's hum cracked the remote quiet of their nook in the marsh, where they've been coming for over a decade, raising Ben's son, Jake, and fishing and hunting just about anything that swims or crawls in coastal Louisiana.



Ben Sanamo, left, and his father, Warren Sanamo, pump diesel fuel into their tugboat at their camp in Terrebonne Parish. The family relies on generators for power after electric infrastructure serving the area was not rebuilt following Hurricane Ida.

This is the Sanamo family's routine now. Their houseboat, which Ben and Warren built from the ground up, is one of nearly 300 properties spanning four remote outposts in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes that had the lights turned off — may-

be for good.

Hurricane Ida damaged some of the electric equipment that powered the camps. For years, the South Louisiana Electric Cooperative

► See **END**, page 8A



STAFF PHOTO BY LESLIE WESTBROOK

A Lao New Year Parade float sits in a front yard in Lanxang Village on Wednesday.

Fun festival turns to chaotic scene

Calls for safety changes follow Lao New Year crash

BY JA'KORI MADISON
Staff writer

The Lao New Year festival, a celebration of culture, music and community, filled the streets of a tiny Iberia Parish community over the first weekend in April.

But what began as a lighthearted celebration filled with traditional Lao dishes, vendors selling bamboo crafts, handmade jewelry and dancing along the parade route quickly turned into a scene of chaos.

Within hours of the parade starting, Devin Eschette, who traveled from Baton Rouge to attend the festival with friends, recalls a moment he'll never forget: A vehicle barreled into a crowded parade route, sending people scattering and leaving more than a dozen injured.

"Everybody was having a good time. ... Everybody was pretty much just hanging out," Eschette said.

► See **FESTIVAL**, page 7A

La. lawmaker again pushing ban on fluoride

BY ALYSE PFEIL
Staff writer

Local governments could hold a vote to stop adding fluoride to their public water systems under a proposal advancing in the Louisiana Legislature, resurfacing a debate that has emerged from the Make America Healthy Again movement.

Last year, an outright ban on fluoridation of public water systems sponsored by Sen. Mike Fesi, R-Houma, failed in the Legislature.

This year, Fesi again pitched the ban, but other senators pushed him to pare it back. Now, his proposal would give towns and parishes that

► See **FLUORIDE**, page 9A

Luxe Bay St. Louis homes selling for cash

'The secret is out' on Mississippi beach town

BY MARTHA SANCHEZ
Staff writer

All across the waterfront neighborhoods of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, real estate agents are tracking a growing trend: Newcomers from around the country are buying million-dollar homes

in cash.

"It's crazy," said Shane Kowalski, a broker and appraiser who often sees cash deals between \$750,000 and \$2 million. "We've just become a little destination. People want to be here."

The influx of wealth is transforming the fast-growing city of Bay St. Louis, where locals and second-homeowners from Louisiana could once buy beach homes for modest prices. It is also an example of the

economic boon invigorating cities across the Gulf Coast, which are surging with new residents and tourists.

Real estate agents and locals call the shift in Bay St. Louis striking. Million-dollar properties are selling along the shoreline, but also on small canals and streets a few blocks off the beach. Many high-end properties sell fast.

Louisiana natives who grew up vacationing on the Mississippi Coast are turn-

ing second homes into full-time residences. New Orleanians are spending weekends house hunting in Bay St. Louis. Homes across the city that were once passed down through generations are now selling to buyers from New York and Texas.

In Hancock County, home to Bay St. Louis, Waveland and Diamondhead, the median home sale price has risen by more than \$80,000 in

► See **HOMES**, page 9A



STAFF FILE PHOTO BY DAVID GRUNFELD

A young boy runs through a flock of seagulls on the beach in Bay St. Louis, Miss.

WEATHER

HIGH 82
LOW 67

PAGE 6B



Business	1E	Deaths	2B	Nation-World	2A
Classified	7D	Living	1D	Opinion	4B
Commentary	5B	Metro	1B	Sports	1C

101ST YEAR, NO. 286

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