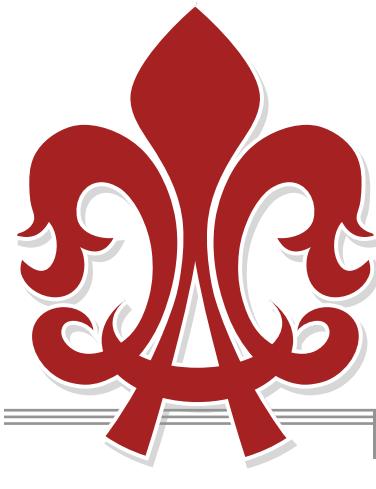




Louisiana's Lunch Winfield here to stay for 2026 season

SPORTS, 1B

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2026

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

FAN EXPO New Orleans lights up Convention Center

Aaron Gonsoulin
Lafayette Daily Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

Louisiana pop culture fans will have a front-row seat to Hollywood history this January as FAN EXPO New Orleans returns with more than 150 panels, celebrity appearances and interactive experiences at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

Running Jan. 9-11, the three-day event features major film, television, gaming, anime and cosplay programming — including a rare "Lord of the Rings" reunion marking 25 years of the franchise.

Among the most anticipated events is "An Evening with the Hobbits" on Saturday night, featuring Elijah Wood, Sean Astin, Billy Boyd and Dominic Monaghan together on stage. The panel already is generating buzz statewide as a once-in-a-generation moment for fans of the fantasy epic.

Other high-profile highlights include:

- John Cena live on Saturday afternoon
- Hayden Christensen special experience on Friday night
- Comics Xplosion, a live art showdown hosted Friday evening in downtown New Orleans

From the show's opening at 3 p.m.

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What are the most popular baby names in 2025?

Alexandria Town Talk
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Louisiana Department of Health released the most popular baby names in the state for 2025, with Noah and Amelia ranking as the top choices for newborns.

According to provisional birth certificate data collected by the Center for Vital Records and Statistics, 214 boys born in Louisiana were named Noah in 2025, making it the most popular boy's name. Amelia topped the list for girls, with 191 babies receiving the name.

What are the top 10 baby names in Louisiana for 2025?

The top names, by ranking (boy, girl):

1. Noah, Amelia
2. Liam, Charlotte

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LA broadband savings could mean more access

Aaron Gonsoulin
Lafayette Daily Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

Louisiana's approach to expanding high-speed internet access is being recognized on the national stage.

Recently, The Wall Street Journal highlighted the state as a model for reducing costs while accelerating broadband deployment.

In a recent editorial, the Journal

pointed to Louisiana as a case study in how streamlined regulations and efficient program design can significantly lower the cost of connecting households and businesses to high-speed internet.

According to the Journal, Louisiana sharply reduced its average cost per connection after adopting updated federal guidance.

"The average cost for each new household or business connected in

Louisiana fell to \$3,943 from \$5,245," The Wall Street Journal reported.

The editorial credited fewer procedural requirements and increased private-sector participation as key factors allowing states like Louisiana to stretch taxpayer dollars further while expanding access, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Louisiana's broadband strategy has

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U.S. President Donald Trump and Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry attend an event with Hyundai executives in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, DC. GETTY IMAGES

State recognized for landing mega project

Greg Hilburn
Shreveport Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Louisiana landed the top economic development mega prize in the U.S. for the second straight year with its \$6 billion Hyundai steel mill project, according to Business Facilities magazine.

Business Facilities' named the Hyundai project in Ascension Parish as its "Platinum Deal of the Year" in 2025, which follows the same recognition in 2024 for the \$25 billion plus Meta data center in Richland Parish.

It's the first time any state has won the "Platinum Deal of the Year" in consecutive years.

Republican Gov. Jeff Landry said the state has "set a new standard for ourselves and the nation" with what his administration says is now \$80 billion or more of industrial investment under

way in Louisiana.

"Louisiana is a force in the industries that power America's economy," Landry said in statement. "Our workforce, our business climate and our commitment to growth are giving companies every reason to invest here with confidence. Louisiana is rising to meet the moment, and the nation is taking notice."

Both the Hyundai and Meta projects have been publicly recognized by President Trump with the Hyundai deal announced at the White House in March 2025.

Trump credited his tariffs with helping convince Hyundai to build its steel mill in Louisiana.

"Get ready. This investment is a clear demonstration that tariffs very strongly work," Trump said in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, surrounded by House leaders, Landry and car executives in March. "They'll be making

their cars here in America."

Hyundai Steel is building the plant on a 1,700-acre site in Donaldsonville. The project is expected to generate more than 5,400 job opportunities in the Capital Region, according to Louisiana Economic Development.

"Back-to-back Platinum Deal of the Year wins signal an undeniable shift for Louisiana," Landry's economic development Secretary Susan Bourgeois said. "We've moved from aspiration to achievement, building a climate where world-class projects choose Louisiana because they know we can deliver. This recognition affirms that Louisiana has entered a new era of competitiveness and success for our state."

Greg Hilburn covers state politics for the USA TODAY Network of Louisiana. Follow him on Twitter @GregHilburn1.

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