When It Rains, It Drains …
Straight into the Mississippi River

Seven-year-old Josie Digirolamo waved her American flag proudly. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was riding through the streets of Norco on his way to tour the Bonnet Carré Spillway. It was an exciting day for area children and an exciting time for the community. FDR’s April 1937 visit came just weeks after the Spillway was opened for the first time since its official dedication two years earlier. “I can remember seeing the President on Apple Street,” said Josie Mire as she is known these days. “We were all lined up with our flags.”

Mire shared her presidential memories during a Bonnet Carré Spillway presentation at a recent Norco Community Advisory Panel (CAP) meeting. Bonnet Carré Spillway Project Manager Chris Brantley, Ph.D., discussed the history, purpose, and recreational aspects of the floodway system.

“If it rains heavily for two or three days in Pennsylvania, chances are that the Mississippi River will rise and we will have to open the spillway to protect New Orleans and other downstream communities from flooding,” said Brantley. A Corps of Engineers project developed in response to the great flood of 1927, which inundated 26,000 square miles as the powerful water flow broke through the levee system. To prevent a recurrence of the resulting loss of lives and damage from the 1927 flood, Congress authorized the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project (MR&T) in the Flood Control Act of 1927. The Corps of Engineers enlarged the existing levee system and constructed new floodways including the Bonnet Carré Spillway which diverts Mississippi River floodwaters to flow into Lake Pontchartrain and eventually the Gulf of Mexico.
Since its first opening in 1937, the Bonnet Carré Spillway has been utilized 11 times, most recently from January 10 to February 1 of this year.

Brantley explained that the project consists of a control structure along the East Bank of the Mississippi River and a spillway to carry the diverted floodwaters to the lake. The mechanically controlled structure is a concrete weir extending for more than a mile and half parallel to the river. The spillway is confined by guide levees and stretches nearly six miles into Lake Pontchartrain.

“It takes three working days to fully open the spillway’s 350 bays although not all bays are always opened,” he said. “Opening the Bonnet Carré Spillway is made at the recommendation of the Corps of Engineers New Orleans District Commander who incorporates environmental factors as well as hydrological, structural, navigational and legal considerations. The decision to open the spillway is made when existing conditions, combined with predicted River stages and discharges, indicate the main levees in New Orleans and other downstream communities would be at risk from high waters.”

“The opening of the Spillway is a major event,” Brantley continued. “And as those who live in the area know, the event attracts a large number of people who line up along the levee to watch the opening.”

Once the decision is made to open the spillway, two cranes are used to lift timber “needles,” one by one, from a selected number of bays. The needles are placed horizontally on top of the structure until they are replaced at closing time.

“Since its first opening to the most recent, the Spillway has always been opened in the same way,” Brantley noted. “Forty-two hundred of the system’s 7,000 needles are the original ones constructed in 1929.”

In addition to minimizing the risk of flood damage, the Bonnet Carré Spillway is a site for diverse recreational activities when it is not open for flood control. Fish and wildlife benefits also result from the spillway’s varied habitats and the introduction of fresh water and nutrients into the Lake Pontchartrain estuary.

For additional information about the Bonnet Carré Spillway, contact the Project Office at 985-764-7484 or visit the recreational pages at www.mvn.usace.mil/Missions/Recreation/BonnetCarreSpillway.aspx
Years ago, a female refining operator was the exception. Not so much anymore. The once male-dominated field is gradually diversifying thanks to outreach programs like Date with Destiny, a career and educational forum which encourages women to consider more non-traditional roles in the workforce. Sponsored by Shell and Motiva Enterprises, LLC, the event provides information and assistance to inspire women to consider careers in the oil and gas industry as an operation technician or maintenance craft professional.

More than 100 women, of different backgrounds and ages, recently participated in the Eighth Annual Date with Destiny featuring career awareness sessions ranging from resume building and interviewing skills to hands-on equipment demonstrations and testimonies from women in the industry. Shell Human Resources Recruitment, Motiva Learning & Development, and the Shell Workforce Development Initiative Team hosted this year’s event.

“Date with Destiny introduces women to the responsibilities and educational requirements of work in the oil and gas industry as well as the job skills they need to secure a position,” explained NMC Learning Manager Theron Williams, who initiated the event eight years ago.

“I really like the professional atmosphere,” commented Courtney Gant, who attended the daylong event. “Date with Destiny is very inviting to females because sometimes you can be intimidated in this industry.”

For Bryanne Mader, the event was a day to learn outside the classroom. “I am looking for a new work experience,” she said. “I am currently a middle school teacher, but interested in other options.”

NMC Health, Safety, Security and Environmental Manager Chryystal Landgraf, who served as a featured speaker, shared her experiences in the industry including her first days as a criminal justice, hair styling, social work, daycare, retail and emergency response. “I had transitioned to supervisory and management positions. The women answered questions and presented highlights of their experiences in previous careers including criminal justice, hair styling, social work, daycare, retail and emergency response.”

Operator Elke Mollere, a 9-year NMC employee, ran an in-home day care center before transitioning to the process technology field. “When I divorced, I had to start over and needed to provide for my family,” said the mother of two teenage sons. “My brother worked in this field and introduced me to it. I am proud that I do this.”

Motiva Convent HSSE Manager Susan Kliebert stressed the importance of safety rules in the workplace. “I would rather have people mad at me for pointing out a safety hazard than see them injure themselves,” she said. “That often requires courage to speak out.”

In a question and answer session, the panelists were asked how they addressed the fear of entering a new field and starting a new job. “Ask questions” was the unanimous response. They advised participants not to be afraid to admit that you don’t know how to do something. You just need to ask. Then, learn how to do it and do it well.

Women interested in the process technology or maintenance craft field are advised to contact area colleges about associate degree programs. Additional information is available at:

- [www.shell.us/careers](http://www.shell.us/careers)
- [www.shell.us/energizeyourfuture](http://www.shell.us/energizeyourfuture)
- [www.shell.us/jobs](http://www.shell.us/jobs)
- [www.shell.us/careers/students-and-graduates/scholarships/associates-degree-students.html](http://www.shell.us/careers/students-and-graduates/scholarships/associates-degree-students.html)
- [www.shell.us/careers](http://www.shell.us/careers)
- [www.shell.us/energizeyourfuture](http://www.shell.us/energizeyourfuture)
- [www.shell.us/jobs](http://www.shell.us/jobs)
- [www.shell.us/careers/students-and-graduates/scholarships/associates-degree-students.html](http://www.shell.us/careers/students-and-graduates/scholarships/associates-degree-students.html)
Norco Manufacturing Complex recently presented a $47,400 donation to the Wetland Watchers for assistance in expanding the program and enriching the group’s park along the lakefront. General Manager Brett Woltjen, who presented the check, took a tour of the Wetland Watchers Park, learning about the park and the wetlands from student volunteers. Program founders Barry Guillot and environmentalist Milton Cambre also participated in the event along with Hurst Principal Steven Gutierrez, NMC HSSE Manager Chrystal Landgraf, Environmental Manager Michael McNally, and External Relations Manager Rochelle Touchard.

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BRETT WOLTJEN | NMC General Manager

Louisiana’s coastline is in danger of disappearing. “Not on our watch,” say Harry Hurst Middle School students. The St. Charles Parish Public Schools’ Wetland Watchers program, under the direction of teacher Barry Guillot, is helping to preserve the LaBranche wetlands through service and education.

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MILTON CAMBRE: Guardian of the Wetlands, Protector of St. Charles Parish

Most Louisiana citizens know the basics of protecting themselves and their property during hurricane season. Norco resident and environmentalist MILTON CAMBRE goes one step further. Known as the “Voice of the LaBranche Wetlands,” for more than 40 years, he has made it his life’s work to help protect St. Charles Parish from hurricane damage by advocating and working for the protection and restoration of the parish’s natural lines of defense.

HIS ACTIVIST ROOTS GREW OUT OF A DESIRE TO PRESERVE THE LIFE HE KNEW. “I grew up on the Mississippi River in Paulina and I saw all the benefits of the river,” he reminisced. “I supported my family by trawling and fishing and hunted the batture, basically living off the land. Once I got out of the service in 1959, I saw it all being destroyed. We were bringing in all those (oil and petro-chemical) companies without controls, letting them do what they pleased. That wasn’t right. Even though I worked in the industry (Cambre is a DuPont retiree), I spoke out, but I was never penalized. After I retired in 1985, I got into it full time. I wanted to leave what I enjoyed for future generations.”

In addition to dedicating himself to protecting the river, he also works to restore and protect the multiple lines of defense that protect the parish from hurricane damage. “THE FIRST THING WE NEED TO DO IS TO PROTECT OUR SHORELINE, keep the lake where it is,” he states. “I’ve been involved in getting the shoreline rocked which helps stop erosion. We had started doing it, but then the state decided they wanted to reclaim a little bit of it and put it out 30 feet into the lake which never made sense to me, but you’re dealing with a bureaucracy. We still have about 15 thousand feet to go and the costs are going up.”

Saving the shoreline is key in restoring and preserving the LaBranche wetlands, a 20,000 acre cypress swamp. Working with local industry and the government, he has also been instrumental as chairman of the Coastal Zone Advisory Board in speaking out against the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, which brought saltwater to the marsh and has since been closed. Cambre also consults with the highway department to ensure the responsible construction of interstate 310. “The saltwater from the lake is killing the cypress and vegetation and the marsh is dying off,” he explains. “The wetlands protect against hurricane tidal surges and it will all be open water, making us vulnerable to storms, if we don’t save it.”

THE SECOND LINE OF DEFENSE IS THE RAILROAD TRACKS. “If you get a tidal surge, the shoreline is about five feet so that would cut a bit,” he explains. “Then a half mile later that water would spread out to hit the railroad embankment which is about eight feet so it would chop off another bunch of feet. You have about a half a mile between the lakeshore and the railroad and more than a mile where the water would spread out so it would impede the progress of the tidal surge. That’s why you want to keep the swamp.”

THE LEVEE IS THE THIRD LINE OF DEFENSE. Cambre has been trying to get the levee built past the Blind River, but at over 30 million dollars a mile, it is a hard sell in a state that has precious few dollars to spare.

Over the years, Cambre has dedicated himself to solving the problems that affect what he still considers a sportsman’s paradise. As both a private citizen and as a constable for 26 years, he has served St. Charles Parish in various capacities, championing wetland projects to industry, governmental agencies and environmental groups. He has been interviewed in numerous environmental documentaries and has won numerous awards and honors. He also works with the Wetland Watchers, a school-based service-learning project that furthers the cause of wetlands preservation.

“The public is better educated today about the importance of the wetlands,” Cambre states, “but unless you’re involved in fishing or hunting, you don’t see how important the wetlands are. We take so much for granted, such as our seafood and our habitat. But everyone should be aware of their purpose. What’s happening now is going to affect all of us, even if it is just in rising flood insurance.”

NEW HIRES

Congratulations to Machinists Brian Magee, Luke Naquin and Ross Becnel, who recently completed Norco Manufacturing Complex New Hire training. They are pictured with Instructor Larry Russell, far right.
The American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM) honored the Norco Manufacturing Complex for its outstanding Refinery and Chemical Safety performance in 2015. The site received two awards at the 24th Annual AFPM Safety Awards program in San Antonio, Texas, this May.

“The recognition speaks to the performance we’ve had year after year,” said NMC HSSE Manager Chrystal Landgraf.

The Motiva Norco Refinery received a Merit Award for its total employee recordable incident rate. The rate is calculated by the number of injuries and illnesses for every 200-thousand man hours. In order to receive the award, the rate has to be lower than 0.6. Motiva Norco achieved 0.2.

Shell Norco Chemical was honored with a Safety Achievement Award for operating a minimum of 365 consecutive days without an employee injury resulting in days away from work, restrictions, transfers or fatality.

“Last year was actually the best performance for safety that we’ve had at the site, so it’s really nice for us to be recognized externally for our performance,” Landgraf noted.

Members of the Norco Manufacturing Complex’s Joint Health and Safety Committee gather in front of the NMC memorial flag pole recognizing employees who lost their lives in the May 5, 1988 incident.

Sixty-one refineries and 80 petrochemical plants were represented at the AFPM awards presentation.
NMC Technical Safety Specialist

LeVar Lewis laughs when he talks about his love of life in Louisiana. You might not expect such strong roots from the former Navy Hospital Corpsman. He has definite intentions to keep on circling the globe. “I lived in 23 countries during my military years and saw half the world,” he explained. But, although he left right after his Hahnville High School Graduation, the St. Charles Parish native certainly knows where home is.

“I had a dream of doing something in the medical field like dentistry or physical therapy but did take a little shift in careers when I came home,” he said. “I recognized that I enjoyed the education and the teaching aspects of helping others.” Armed with degrees in Healthcare Administration and Occupational Safety and Health, Lewis’s family encouraged him to explore the petrochemical industry when he left the military 11 years ago. “I never thought of working in this field even though much of my family did,” he said. “I finally got my feet wet and I really enjoy this industry. I like the challenge, and I especially like helping people learn more about safety and taking care of themselves. I have worn ten different hats in my lifetime of experiences, but I definitely love my safety hat.”

Lewis’s Navy hat covered experiences that stay with him today. “I have learned that no matter where you come from, a small town or large town, the world is so much bigger than what you think,” he explained. “If you take the time to get to understand others and their cultures, you find that people are so much alike in their many different ways. It is amazing how much I have learned from the friends I have all over the world. Carrying that type of learning and understanding into the diverse workplace and community will make you a better person. I know that it helped me to grow personally as well as to appreciate my heritage.”

Lewis’s return to Louisiana after his years of service came just two weeks before Hurricane Katrina in 2005. He didn’t realize it then, but weather would become an important part of his life. He is married to WVUE television meteorologist Nicondra Norwood. The couple, who met while they were both out Salsa dancing, are the parents of eight-month-old Gage.

Travel buffs and admitted foodies, the Lewis family enjoys exploring both new and favorite places and restaurants. By the way, Lewis says the key to world peace is food. Based on his military experiences and his keen interest in other cultures, he says the solution is to invite the world leaders to a dinner. “Cook each one his or her favorite meal,” he suggested. “Everybody loves to eat and everybody loves to talk about food. The table conversation would be positive, full of energy and soon everyone would be extra agreeable.”

Lewis’s love of learning continues. He is currently working on a master’s degree in Occupational Safety and Health and is considering enrolling in a culinary degree program in the future.
River Parishes Students Awarded River Parishes Education Foundation Scholarships

According to Norco Manufacturing Complex External Relations Manager and RPEF President ROCHELLE TOUCHARD, the foundation presented $18,000 in scholarships to St. Charles, St. James and St. John Parishes students pursuing a college degree or associate degree in process technology (PTEC). RPEF Scholarship Chair MARY LOU SUMRALL presented the awards, acknowledging individual academic, extra-curricular accomplishments and community service.

“The River Parishes Education Foundation is pleased to award scholarships to outstanding students who will soon be part of the workforce and leaders in the community,” Sumrall said. “Congratulations go out to the families who raised such good children. Parental involvement in the schools is one of the founding principles of RPEF and your dedication to your children is obvious. We also want to say a special ‘thank you’ to the teachers these young adults have encountered throughout their education.”