



## VILLAGE OF FRENCH SETTLEMENT NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2016 – by Mayor Toni Guitrau

### GRANTS AWARDED TO THE VILLAGE OF FRENCH SETTLEMENT

- **Louisiana Government Assistance Program (LGAP) Grant, formally Rural Development Grant.**
  - 2015-2016: Applied for \$35,000 to fund two street lights located at the dangerous intersection of Hwy. 16/42, and to replace the outdoor digital sign used for communication.
  - LGAP 2014-15: Awarded \$10,500 to purchase police equipment currently used in the 2015 Tahoe.
  - LGAP 2013-2014: Awarded \$10,750 to purchase computer equipment in the French Settlement Municipal Building.
  - LGAP 2011-2012: Awarded \$6,050 to purchase concrete for the municipal parking lot driveway and to access the municipal storage building.
  - LGAP 2010-2011: Awarded \$12,500 to clear, and prepare the public property purchased in 2010. We now have a walking trail through native trees and plants that leads to the entrance of our swamp, thus connecting our two properties. This has proved to be an excellent exercise path and provides several locations for photo-ops. It also allowed for the replacement of 16 old fluorescent lights, with new energy saving parabolic lights, in the municipal building meeting room, lobby, and clerk's office.
  - LGAP 2009-2010: Awarded \$12,500 to purchase limestone for a new 17,000 square foot parking area. This parking area is needed for municipal, pavilion, museum functions and future community/cultural center event parking.
  - **Other LGAP Grants Prior to 2009:** Awarded \$25,000 to replace the old, damaged, tile floors with ceramic tiles throughout the municipal building. **Additional grant funds** were used to repair the municipal building walls, replace all of the old windows with energy efficient windows, to repair and renovate the pavilion and much more over the years.
  - French Settlement Boat – Awarded \$10,800. The boat is used for flood events and rescue/recovery of victims.
- **State Appropriations 2009-2010: Awarded \$48,500 for the following:**
  1. Installed a new sewer system for the municipal building as the existing septic system was beyond repair and was backing up water into the town hall.
  2. Erected a chain link (storm) fence along the new municipal property line to delineate our park.
  3. Asbestos report and removal of asbestos from the old structures on the property purchased in 2010 in compliance with federal/state regulations. Demolition of said structures and select clearing of additional property revealed a stately elm, majestic camellia, sassafras and many native species.
  4. Constructed a 30'X50'X12' storage building to house emergency supplies and vehicles.
- **DNR Grant:** Awarded \$64,829 to install a Geo-thermal system – “Green Project” The Town Hall now has the most efficient A/C and heater that should have a service life of 25 years saving close to \$225,000 in utility bills over its life span.

### Other Grant Funds Report

Nine years ago in 2007, French Settlement applied for and was awarded our largest single grant totaling \$103,150. This grant enabled the Village of French Settlement to improve our ability to patrol the community, as well as ensure the safety of our police officers. This project was part of the Natural Disaster Initiative and is located in the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Initiative. We purchased two police vehicles, which we still currently have in service, maintaining to all safety standards, six bullet-proof (ballistic) vests, and a digital communication sign relaying Village news/emergency update. These purchases proved their worth starting 2008 hurricane season all the way to the March 2016 flooding. That grant award allowed us to be better prepared for future emergencies and disasters at no out-of-pocket expense to French Settlement. As you know all of this equipment is in need of repairs or replacement since it has been 9 years. Between the years 2007-2009, French Settlement was awarded \$44,186.83 through LGAP; \$1,853 in grant funds through Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement; and \$5,820 through Homeland Security grants. There are a few grants not listed, and I am sure that we have probably collected close to or over \$500,000 in past years.

**Taxes.** French Settlement does not collect property or sales taxes and our tax rate remains lower than the parish which allows us to purchase homes, vehicles, boats, etc., at a lower tax rate. Through grants, the village is able to keep our tax rate as low as possible and serve our residents without adding the burden of yet another tax. The recent vote in the Louisiana Legislature to raise state sales taxes does not come to or benefit the Village.

**Community/Cultural Center.** In 2010, we purchased five acres adjacent to the existing town property in order to construct a community/cultural center. We have since demolished the old structures and cleared the property as stated above. The parking lot has already been in use for almost five years, and we have continued to set aside money for the community center so that we do not incur debt in order to construct it. This year we were encouraged to apply for Capital Outlay funding which we have done. Unfortunately, with the budget situation of the State of Louisiana, we did not receive the funds. We will continue to move forward. In the last year, we were able to complete the plans of the community center. It was presented and approved at a town meeting and

is available at the town hall if you wish to review. We will prepare the grounds next and build the community center in phases as funding allows. Once the basic structure is built, we plan to apply for grants to complete the inside. This proposed facility would serve as a community center for all area residents, their activities and cultural events. In 2010, French Settlement spent \$100,000 local matching funding for the land on which this facility will be located. However, since French Settlement has a very limited revenue base, and since this facility will also be built to serve as a "safe area" in times of emergency for our employees; we plan to ask the Commissioner of Administration to declare the balance of the match requirement not applicable. The facility would include a reception hall, kitchen, storage, and bathrooms, safe room for employees during sudden weather warning events. A cultural center becomes the nucleus of a community for all ages—young and elderly alike to share the yearning to absorb our heritage. It's this yearning that spurs the arts, rural history and can spur needed economic development for the Village of French Settlement and our visitors. We can celebrate the events of our village in our village births, weddings, anniversaries, seasonal events, educational seminars, art exhibits and historical moments. At present, there are no such cultural gathering centers in the southern part of our parish. A quote from Marcus Gravery: *A people without the knowledge of their past history, original culture is like a tree without roots.* LaCote Franchise, The French Coast or French Settlement, a territory of France before 1800, prior to the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and our statehood in 1812, was a jovial Creole Culture along a well traversed Amite River waterway. These unique immigrants trapped, farmed, logged cypress, milled logs, developed cypress shingles for shelters, and marketed these wares to New Orleans via steamboat able to travel further north to Bayou Manchac to the Mississippi River. This rich Creole Gumbo was a blend of Native American, French, Spanish, Haitian and African who learned the American ways, language while maintaining their unique culture. Our village welcomed Italian, German, Irish and many Europeans immigrants migrating into this sleepy river village. Our people lived in harmony without conflicts even through the Civil War. With the Industrial Boom, our state saw an exodus of many residents to serve honorably in two World Wars, to work in the Mississippi River Petro-Chemical Corridor, but it allowed many relatives to travel back to their birth right along the new state highway system. In 1950 LaCote Franchise became the Village of French Settlement. Through the Korean War, Vietnam War and current conflicts since 911 we serve and stand proud as Americans. French Settlement Elementary and High Schools have received National Blue Ribbon Awards, recognized by industry, the state educational system as maintaining a high graduation rate, thus going on to see our young adults achieve four year degrees. We're still that sleepy village with the unique Creole Culture that has evolved to support business and industry with the talents of our people. Last year we celebrated 50 years as a village, but without a Cultural Center for the people to share, teach, and experience our rich history and life.

**Census 2010.** In 1965, the population was 670; in 2010 it was 1,116. The city limits are 1,000 feet on either side of the major highways so there isn't much room for growth. This year the Village of French Settlement was listed as #7 in the top 9 Historic Villages in Louisiana That Will Transport You to a Different Time, by Only In Your State. In the year 2020, a new census will be taken and I am fairly certain we will reach a population of 1200 and will become the Town of French Settlement. This will not bring any drastic changes other than instead of 3 at-large aldermen, we will have 5 at-large aldermen and the expenses related to additional elected officials. Also, the name will change from Village of French Settlement to Town of French Settlement.

**Building Permits.** Following Hurricane Katrina, the State of Louisiana required that all building inspectors be certified with multiple certifications. Since French Settlement cannot afford to pay certified inspectors and building officials, over the last few years we entered into an agreement with Livingston Parish to oversee all of our residential and commercial building permits, including addressing. To date, this arrangement has worked without any problems and at a cost savings to the village.

**FS Police Department.** We hired two full time, several part-time and reserve officers that adds an additional 75 years of law enforcement experience to our police department. We continue to be thankful for the support of the Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office in our law enforcement activities. We ask that you continue to buckle-up, carry updated insurance cards, registration, inspection stickers, and never drink and drive.

**October 2016. Annual Bridge-to-Bridge Yard Sale and the Creole Festival.** The festival is a fund raiser to help the French Settlement Historical Society support the village's museum. The festival is always the third Sunday of October from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. We encourage you and your family to participate in these fun-filled events.

**Town Meetings.** We encourage you to attend our town meetings held on the second Wednesday of each month at 6:00 p.m. In July of 2015, we celebrated the Village of French Settlement's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. *"Governor John J. McKeithen appointed Earl Berthelot, C.F. Meadours, Lee Roy Salassi to serve as the three initial aldermen, and Schofield Lobell as mayor of the Village of French Settlement."* **For 51 years,** the Village of French Settlement has been and is still truly blessed with distinguished men and women who served and will continue to serve effectively and with dedication. We have maintained a quiet community, low crime rate, and blue ribbon schools. We depend on grants, franchise fees, and occupational licenses to run the village, and provide services. Our focus has been on providing police protection and saving money to build a much needed community center.

**Board of Aldermen:** Glen Newell, Teresa Miller, Danette Aydele Carrier. If you would like to speak to any of our elected officials, you may contact us through the town hall at (225) 698-6100 to set up a meeting.