

Top business stories of 2009 include highs and lows

By Helen Wale Turner

A new year is almost here, and we wonder where 2009 went. It was a very eventful year, that's for sure. On the national scene, the top news stories have to be (1) the inauguration of President Barack Obama, (2) the economy that tanked in fall 2008 is still in trouble, (3) the jobless rate that topped 10 percent and is hovering thereabouts nationally; (4) the \$700+ billion stimulus plan passed by Congress that was supposed to stimulate the economy and keep the jobless rate below 8 percent but has not succeeded; and (5) the national healthcare bill that is currently being contentiously debated.

Meanwhile, back in Livingston Parish, the economy and unemployment wasn't as bad as it was nationally, but things were still hoping. The following stories are contenders for the top local business story of 2009. If you missed the stories the first time or would like to read them again, they're available online at

Welcome to the Parish



Gov. Bobby Jindal tours the new CECO facility in Walker in February.



Walker Mayor Bobby Font, right, welcomes Dennis Stime to the community.



Gov. Bobby Jindal was back in Livingston Parish in November to cut the ribbon at Bercen Southern.

livingstonbusiness.com in the months indicated:

Livingston Parish had very good news in the form of three businesses that came to the parish and brought good jobs with them and

a major health clinic broke ground . . .

Bercen Southern relocates its worldwide headquarters and labs to Denham Springs. This company that produces chemicals for the paper industry brought a number of highly paid jobs and a total annual payroll of \$2.3 million to Livingston Parish. (November, page 16).

CECO builds new plant in Walker. Compressor Engineering Corporation (CECO), the world's largest independent manufacturer of engine and compressor replacement parts, chose the Livingston Parish Industrial Park at Walker as the site to expand its Houston-based business. The 44,000 square foot facility brought 34 jobs to the parish (February, page 14).

Stine opens \$14 million, 100,000 sq.-ft. home improvement store and garden center in Walker. The Stine family of Sulphur, LA, owns and operates the largest Louisiana-based

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building supply/home improvement company, with 13 stores and over 1,000 employees. They chose Walker for its location and growth potential. The store has about 80 employees. (March, page 10).

North Oak Medical Complex breaks ground for a clinic at Satsuma. Construction began when the first shovel was turned at the 30-acre site in April. The new \$32 million facility will have two stories and 47,000 square feet for doctors' offices and diagnostic services including radiology, cardiology and laboratories. It is scheduled for completion in the fourth quarter of 2010. (October, page 16).

In hopes that more new jobs will be created in 2010, two organizations hired new key members . . .

LEDC gets new director. John Ware retired from the Livingston Economic Development Council after a very successful career and was succeeded by Stuart Litvin effective Nov. 1. Litvin will lead the effort to attract new businesses to Livingston Parish. Ware is now running the DEMCO Dixie Business Incubator; both entities are located in the DEMCO building on Range Ave. in Denham Springs. (October, page 12).

Livingston Parish Chamber of Commerce hires executive director. The Chamber tapped Jack Stewart to come onboard as a professional executive, a position the Chamber had not filled for several years. Stewart and the Chamber are working to increase the membership and expand services to existing members. (September, page 6).

There was no shortage of conflicts for the Parish Council, especially when it came to roads and debris removal . . .

Roads Petition succeeds. Citizens fed up with the actions of the parish council were successful in obtaining enough signatures on a grassroots petition to force the council to adopt more stringent standards for accepting roads into the parish roads system. (June, page 15, and August, page 8).

Hurricane debris removal creates controversy.

New Faces of the Parish



Stuart Litvin was tapped to succeed John Ware as executive director of the Livingston Economic Development Council.



Jack Stewart came on board as the new executive director of the Livingston Parish Chamber of Commerce.



This is an artist's rendering of the North Oaks Medical Complex being built at the Satsuma exit of Interstate 12.

Whether due to miscommunication, ineptness or deliberate transgression by many parties, the parish may be left holding the bag for millions of dollars in hurricane debris removal costs that do not meet FEMA criteria and will therefore not be reimbursed by the federal government. Parish government, contractors, FEMA, landowners and supervisors are all pointing fingers, and it has yet to be deter-

mined who will have to pay what.

I-12 widening begins. After going back and forth on how far to the east the three-laning of I-12 will extend, the actual construction finally began. The current plan is for the widening to end between Denham Springs and Walker, but local officials are still hopeful that funds will be found to take it all the way to Walker.

The parish had some gloomy news . . .

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The Jones-Price grassroots road petition was delivered to the parish offices and later adopted as law.



The Tony Roi Elvis Experience was the first Branson show brought to Livingston Parish by Paco Swain.



Old City Hall reopened to the public in April for the first time in over 12 years.

Sales taxes were down across the parish for the year, the parish continues to protest new FEMA flood maps that would greatly increase flood insurance rates, Carter Plantation at Springfield is in financial trouble, and sadly, there was at least one death in the parish from swine flu.

There were a few more bits of good news as Sam's Club announced it will build near the Bass Pro store and . . .

Denham Springs North Park announces huge expansion. The new facilities will include indoor and outdoor swimming pools and splash parks. A new fishing pond

is already open. (April, page 17).

Branson shows come to Livingston Parish. Paco Swain Promotions brought several musical shows from Branson, Mo., to Livingston Parish. The first few shows were staged at the Suma Hill Conference Center in Satsuma before the venue was changed to the North Park Recreation Center in Denham Springs. Shows scheduled so far for 2010 include Tony Roi -the Elvis Experience, The Platters and the Goldwing Express. (April, page 9).

Old City Hall reopens as museum, tourist center/rest stop

for the Denham Springs Antiques Village. After more than 12 years of fundraisers and planning, the renovation was complete, and the City of Denham Springs and the Denham Springs Main Street Commission hosted the rededication of the historic building on April 17. (April, page 11).

While it's not exactly business news, the most disappointing news of the year has to be the LSU football team's showing, while the best news is the perfect (so far) record of the New Orleans Saints. LSU did manage to snare a berth in the

Capital One Bowl in Orlando, and they will always remain perennial favorites of most everyone in the area, but the Saints have captured the hearts of football fans this year and given disheartened LSU fans something to be excited about.

The Super Bowl will be in Miami February 7, 2010. Most everyone hereabouts is betting the Saints will be in that game and will come out as champions - which would surely qualify as one of the top stories of 2010!



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