

Jefferson Parish Council, officials mark Grand Isle's renewal on eve of Tarpon Rodeo

Posted by [ashaw](#) July 22, 2009 16:45PM

Grand Isle has a new welcome mat: a "hurricane-proof" sign that Jefferson Parish officials unveiled Wednesday as a symbol of the barrier island's resilience after Hurricanes Gustav and Ike battered it in September.

"We will never abandon this island, we will always be here," Parish President Aaron Broussard said. "This is a symbol that the people of this island aren't going anywhere. They are entrenched."

The \$25,000 steel sign bolted to a concrete slab replaces hand-painted plywood signs that have repeatedly blown away since Hurricane Katrina. Consisting of three fish sculptures mounted atop masts behind an undulating blue wave of sheet metal, the sign might seem more at home on the boardwalk of a Florida resort town than a rustic fishing village.

"We wanted to fancy it up a bit with all the bright colors; be a little more progressive," said Greg Cantrell, the landscape architect for the project.

Like the plywood signs, some of the fishing camps destroyed by the hurricanes have been replaced by something more upscale: homes valued at more than \$500,000.

The new sign's dedication launched a daylong celebration of the town's renewal. Beyond conducting the Parish Council's annual Grand Isle meeting to kick off the three-day International Tarpon Rodeo, officials broke ground on a long-awaited fire station and appraised the new storm surge levee being built by the Army Corps of Engineers.

As the caravan of official vehicles weaved through the island's camps, the work of the Army Corps of Engineers - miles of burrito-like tubes packed with sand along the southern beach - ran parallel to the road. Col. Robert Sinkler, chief of the corps' Hurricane Protection Office, called it the best storm surge defense yet for an island pummeled by four hurricanes in as many years.

The 13-foot-high, six-mile-long, \$26-million federal project is half finished and on pace to be completed by December, Sinkler said. It began in April, after Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration brokered a deal that ended a 14-year stalemate about who would pay for it.

The project will help protect communities inland, aiding the island in its role as a speed-bump against speeding hurricanes, officials said.

"Geologically, Grand Isle may be the most important barrier island in the world," Jefferson Parish Sheriff Newell Normand said. "That's the story we must keep telling or the people in Westwego will have beach front property."

Normand is president of this year's Tarpon Rodeo, which kicks off Thursday. Officials expect as many as 15,000 fishing aficionados to flood Grand Isle, home to roughly 1,200 people year-round. The tournament, which began in 1928, is the oldest fishing competition of its kind in the country.

Business owners are relying on the pull of the parish's \$50,000 "Grand Isle Alive" ad campaign to boost the island's tourist-driven economy.

Tourists will travel the newly opened Leeville Bridge, a tollway that has sparked some criticism from local officials who believe residents should not have to pay for the only highway to the island.

Mayor David Camardelle said a meeting last Friday at the governor's mansion scored \$100,000 in state money to exempt Grand Isle residents from having to pay tolls until next summer's legislative session. Jefferson Parish Councilman Chris Roberts, whose district includes Grand Isle, has said Jefferson's delegation plans to lobby to make the exemptions permanent.

The state will start collecting tolls on Monday. The Leeville Bridge, which replaces a rickety drawbridge that often broke down, is the first phase of a three-part project to elevate 19 miles of flood-prone Louisiana 1 between Golden Meadow and Port Fourchon, which serves 90 percent of the deepwater oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico.

Parish officials also took a moment to break ground for a new fire station after a four-year wait. The original station, like much of the island, was crushed by Hurricane Katrina.

Still, after three more storms since 2005, the people are still here.

"The sand shifts in Grand Isle. One storm pushes us to the east, and another storm pushes to the west," Camardelle said. "But we're not going no place."

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Comments

bunkermental says...

People living below the bridge gain the most from it and should pay more to use it.

Posted on 07/22/09 at 6:34PM

COLONELJPSO says...

WOW WEE !!!!25,000 Dollar taxpayer signs and 500,000 homes next to loud music blarring all night in a town run where the same old politicians change the laws to suit themselves and free tolls for a select few all on a one mile and a half island that Noodle Normand claims is one of the most important in the entire world(NOT)..... I CAN'T WAIT TILL THE BIG ONE COMES AGAIN,IT'S REALLY FUNNY WHEN ALL THE NEWS STATIONS RUN THEIR CAMERA TRUCKS AND REPORTERS DOWN THERE WHEN A HURRICANE COMES TO WATCH THEM ALL EVACUATE.....

Posted on 07/22/09 at 8:15PM

milfhunter13 says...

The only reason I would go to Grand Isle would be to get some tata from one of Jefferson Parish's secretaries.

Nothin but beer, loose women and fish.

My kind of family event.