

The Weekly Press

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25-MARCH 3, 2021 A PEOPLE'S PUBLICATION VOL. 43 • NO.42 • FREE

STATE/LOCAL PG 2 EBRPSS ANNOUNCES SUSPENSION OF ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENT STATE/LOCAL PG 3 GIRL SCOUT COOKIE SEASON KICKS OFF RELIGION PG 4 KNOCK, KNOCK

Online Registration Deadline For The March 20 Election



BATON ROUGE, La. — Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin is reminding Louisianians that Saturday, February 27 is the online registration deadline for the March 20 election. This deadline is for citizens who are unregistered, as well as registered voters who would like to make changes to their registration. Citizens can check their registration or register to vote online at www.GeauxVote.com. In order to submit electronically, a Louisiana driver's license or Louisiana special ID card must be used.

After registering, voters should download the Geaux-Vote mobile smartphone

See ELECTION, on page 2

BLACK HISTORY

February 25

• Hiram R. Revels, first Black US Senator, took oath of office 1870

February 27



• Marion Anderson, singer, born in Philadelphia 1897.
• Charlotte Ray, first Black woman lawyer, graduated Howard U, 1872

February 28

Phillis Wheatly, poetess, died 1753-1784

March 1

Howard University, Washington DC, chartered, 1867

WEATHER

	MON. 02/15 Rain High 70°.
	TUE. 02/16 Partly Sunny High 64°.
	WED. 02/17 Rainy High 67°.
	THUR. 02/18 Mostly Cloudy High 71°.

INDEX

State & Local	2 & 3
Religion	4
Church Directory	4
Business	5
Business Directory	5
Sports	6

Governor's Office Proposes Hopeful Budget With no Spending Cuts



Gov. John Bel Edwards proposed a new state budget with no spending cuts and a small pay raise for teachers. Photo credit: Sarah Gamard/LSU Manship School News Service

BATON ROUGE—The Edwards administration on Friday proposed a budget for fiscal 2022 that would use federal coronavirus aid to avoid cuts and provide ad-

ditional funds to K-12 and higher education.

The \$36.6 billion budget provides annual pay increases of \$400 to K-12 public school

teachers and \$200 for K-12 support staff, a proposal that teachers unions immediately criticized as too small.

Jay Dardenne, the commis-

sioner of administration, told legislators that the budget also includes a \$56 million increase in funding

See CUTS, on page 2

Governor John Bel Edwards, Mayor Broome, LDH Mark Start of North Baton Rouge Vaccine Clinic



Governor John Bel Edwards



Mayor Sharon Weston Broome

BATON ROUGE, La. - The Louisiana Department of Health will host a vaccine clinic in North Baton Rouge on Fri., Feb. 26 and Sat., Feb. 27 from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m.

The clinic will be at Living Faith Christian Center located on Winbourne Avenue.

According to officials, appointments for the public to get vaccinated have been filled.

Governor John Bel Edwards, Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome, several local leaders and

See CLINIC, on page 3

House Democrats Poised to Pass Biden's \$1.9 Trillion Relief Plan Despite Setback on Minimum Wage

The president's wide-ranging relief bill is expected to clear the House on Friday night along party lines

The House moved toward a vote Friday on President Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan, with Democrats pushing forward despite united GOP opposition to the massive relief package aimed at stabilizing the economy and boosting coronavirus vaccinations and testing.

Biden's first major legisla-

See HOUSE, on page 2



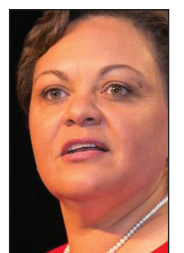
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) arrives at the Capitol on Friday.

Sen. Karen Carter Peterson Files Legislation to End Private Prison Contracts

New Orleans, LA - Sen. Karen Carter Peterson introduced a bill for the 2021 legislative session to end and ban private prison contracts in Louisiana.

Beginning in January 2022, SB16 would bar the state and any local government from entering into or renewing a contract with a private, for-profit prison company. The legislation also provides that no Louisiana inmate will be housed in a for-

See PRISON, on page 2



Sen. Karen Carter Peterson

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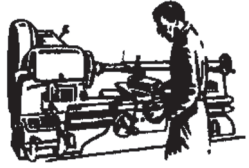
STATE & LOCAL

BLACK HISTORY

■ **March 2**
Freedman's Bureau founded for Black Education, 1865

■ **March 3**
Richard Allen founded AME Church, 1794

READER INFORMATION



How to Reach Us
General Information 225-775-2002
Email brweeklypress@yahoo.com

The office is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday - Friday and located at 4910 Montecello Blvd. Baton Rouge, LA 70814

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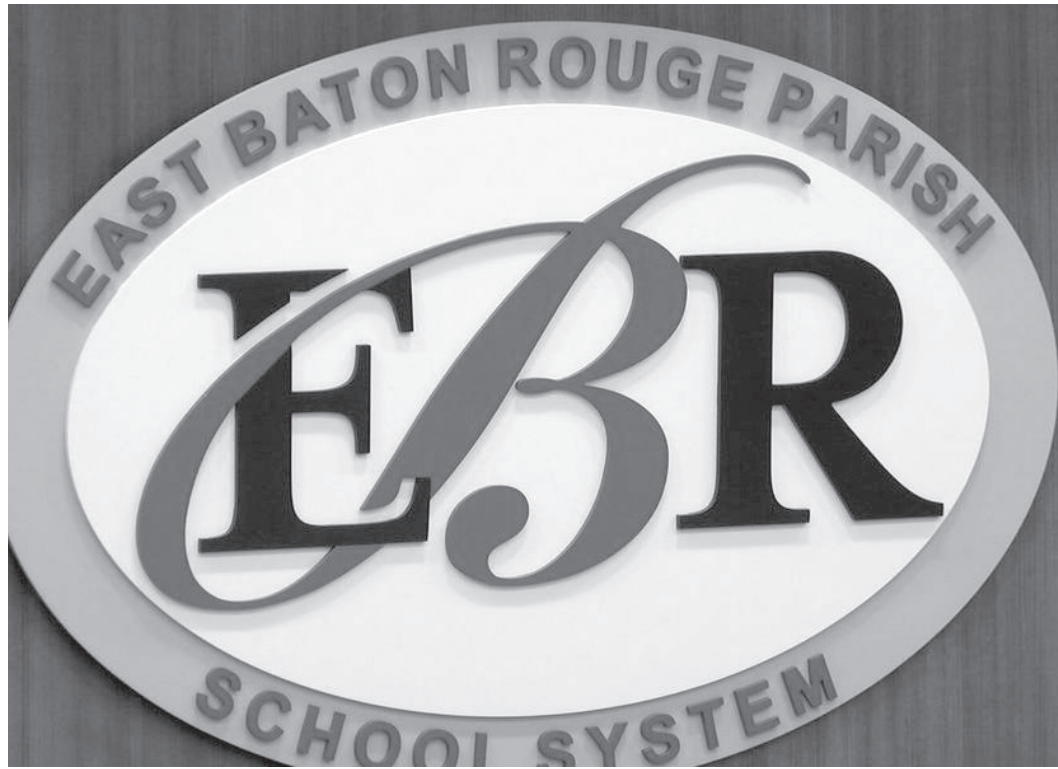
The Weekly Press

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All money orders or checks should be made payable to The Baton Rouge Weekly Press
4910 Montecello Blvd.
Baton Rouge, La. 70814

Phone: (225) 775-2002
E-Mail: brweeklypress@yahoo.com
Office Hours: Monday-Friday
9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
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EBRPSS Announces Suspension of Assessment Requirement for Magnet Placement Due to COVID-19



BATON ROUGE, La. - In an effort to remove potential barriers for our students and families in these challenging times, and after much feedback and conversations with key stakeholders, Dr. Sito Narcisse has decided to suspend the assessment requirement for students applying to all EBRPSS magnet programs which require a standardized test score.

"The pandemic has unfortunately created challenges for school systems nationally and the East Baton Rouge Parish School System is no exception. It is my goal as superintendent to ensure that students have access to all specialized programs that require the review of standardized test scores. The district will suspend the assessment requirement for students in grades 4-11 for all applicants who applied for a magnet seat for the 2021-2022 school year," stated Dr. Narcisse.

To qualify for a program, students must still meet the minimum

required cumulative 2.5 grade point average

Students whose applications were marked ineligible because of the result of their assessment during the initial phase of the Magnet Application period, but were otherwise eligible, will have their applications revisited by the Director of Magnet Programs. Once this review is completed, the applicant will be notified by mail; however, the application portal will not re-open for schools with wait pools or schools not listed currently in the magnet portal.

If seats are not available because of the seating capacity at a school, the applicant's name will be placed in a wait pool and selected as outlined in the district's selection process once seats become available.

There are no changes to the screening process for students in admission-based programs in grades K-3.

More importantly, to pro-

vide equity and equitable access to specialized programs for all our students, the district offers programs that do not require academic admission requirements at the following schools with seats still available: Park Forest and Villa del Rey Elementary, Park Forest Middle, Belaire, Glen Oaks, Tara and Scotlandville High schools.

It is my goal to ensure that students have every opportunity to participate in programs as much as possible. To participate in the magnet application process, and to determine what programs are available, please visit ebmagnet.org.

For more information about this process, please call the Office of Magnet Programs at 225-922-5443 or send inquiries to magnet@ebschools.org.

HOUSE from page 1

five package has the overwhelming support of House Democrats, who narrowly control the chamber. Republicans are expected to oppose the legislation en masse, ensuring a sharply partisan outcome just a month after Biden was inaugurated with calls for bipartisanship and unity.

The vote was expected late Friday. House passage would send the legislation to the Senate, where bigger fights await.

The action in the House comes a day after the Senate parliamentarian ruled that the \$15 minimum wage in the legislation is not permitted under Senate rules. Nonetheless, House Democrats intend to pass the legislation with the \$15 minimum wage included, and it is unclear how the issue will ultimately get resolved.

Beyond the minimum-wage increase, the sprawling relief bill would provide \$1,400 stimulus payments to tens of millions of American households; extend enhanced federal unemployment benefits through August; provide \$350 billion in aid to states, cities, U.S. territories and tribal governments; and boost funding for vaccine distribution and

coronavirus testing — among myriad other measures, such as nutritional assistance, housing aid and money for schools.

Democrats hope to push the legislation through both chambers and get it signed into law by March 14, when enhanced unemployment benefits are set to expire. It is uncertain whether disputes over the minimum wage or other issues could complicate that timeline.

On Thursday night, the Senate's parliamentarian ruled the wage hike as written could not proceed under "reconciliation," the budgetary maneuver Democrats are using to pass the stimulus bill through the Senate without GOP votes.

Liberals erupted, with some even suggesting the nonpartisan parliamentarian should be fired, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said the wage increase would stay in the bill, at least for now.

"The Senate parliamentarian's ruling is disappointing; raising the minimum wage would give 27M+ Americans a raise during this devastating economic crisis," Pelosi said Thursday night on Twitter. "House Dems are determined to #FightFor15. This policy will remain in [the bill] and pass tomorrow."

CUTS from page 1

for the state's higher education system, \$19.8 million of which is intended for faculty pay raises.

Besides the increase for higher education, the \$186 million in total increases in spending include:

- Department of Education: \$40 million for the teacher pay raises.

- TOPS scholarships and GO Grants for Louisiana college students: \$23.2 million.

- Corrections and local housing for inmates: \$59.4 million.

- Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness: \$11.5 million.

- Net change in debt service: \$14.3 million.

"We're in a better place than many thought possible," Edwards said Thursday. "This is some hopeful and bright news in a period of time that hasn't been so bright."

The lack of cuts is due — for the most part — to hundreds of millions in federal support. In addition to aid provided to healthcare and higher education, stimulus checks encouraged Louisianans to spend more and kept the state's sales tax revenue from declining as much as expected.

The federal government will pay a larger share of Medicaid payments. States are responsible for a portion of the Medicaid funding each year, but because of the pandemic, Louisiana's contribution is significantly less than in previous years.

"This is the thing that has come in and saved the day for the budget when you come right down to it," said Dardenne.

The budget does not include

any money that the state might receive from the new COVID-19 aid package that President Joe Biden has proposed. It also does not include any extra funding for early childhood education. Dardenne said he hoped the state would be able to finance that through some of the direct federal aid for education.

The governor's proposal kicks off the budget process. The Legislature, which meets from April 12 to June 10, will make its own decisions about the budget. It needs to pass a balanced budget before the next fiscal year starts on June 1.

As of Friday, there was no change in the \$293 million in excess revenue for fiscal year 2021.

Despite the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, seven named storms and an unprecedented ice storm, Dardenne is optimistic, saying despite the economic restraints, the state is headed in the right direction with the unemployment rate recovering. Moody's Rating Agency recently assessed Louisiana's outlook, citing careful fiscal management and adjusting the state's standing from stable to positive.

While the governor's proposal for fiscal year 2022 avoids cuts, the budget will be more strained in the following years as federal aid is expected to disperse after this year.

In a Revenue Estimating Committee meeting in January, Legislative Chief Economist Greg Albrecht projected that employment and state revenue would not return to pre-pandemic levels until 2023 to 2024. He added that the state would have to open its economy. Otherwise, significant cuts would have to be made.

PRISON from page 1

profit prison facility after January 2028.

Sen. Karen Carter Peterson released the following statement after the bill's filing:

"Our criminal justice system is broken. For too long, we've allowed corporations to line their pockets and make millions off of the backs of incarcerated people. For-profit prisons regularly sacrifice safety, exploit prisoners, and lobby for harsher sentencing laws — all to help their bottom line.

"Louisiana has the highest percentage of our citizens behind

See **PRISON**, on page 3

ELECTION from page 1

app which provides registration information as well as voting districts, sample ballots, polling place information and election results. Voters may also utilize the virtual

voter assistant, GeauxBot, to access pertinent election information such as registration deadlines, election dates, polling locations and hours. GeauxBot is accessible by visiting voterportal.sos.la.gov or by selecting Elections and Voting on sos.la.gov.

Early voting for the March 20

election is scheduled for Saturday, March 6 through Saturday, March 13 from 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (excluding Sunday, March 14).

For more information, contact the Elections Division by calling 1.800.883.2805 or emailing elections@sos.la.gov.

THIS MONTH
[FEBRUARY]
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SWAMP FLASHLIGHT NIGHT
Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center
Feb. 12 | 5-9 p.m.

TEEN POP UP AND UNPLUG
Anna T. Jordan Community Park
Feb. 13 | 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

SATURDAY MORNING STUDIO: SUSTAINABLE SCULPTURES
Milton J. Womack Park
Feb. 13 | 10:30 a.m.-noon

CAMP-IN
Lovett Road Park
Feb. 13 | 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

MARDI GRAS MISCHIEF
Cadillac Street Park + Hamilton Ave. Park
Feb. 15 | 12:30-5:30 p.m.

MARDI GRAS HOLIDAY CAMPS
Various Locations
Feb. 15-17
brec.org/holidaycamp

ADAPTIVE SUNSHINE SOCIAL Virtual
Feb. 19 | 6-8 p.m.

E-SPORTS TOURNAMENT Virtual
Feb. 20 | noon

GEAUX FISH CATFISH RODEO
Howell Community Park
Feb. 20 | 7:30-11:30 a.m.

ART UNWINE: BEATNIK ART Virtual
Feb. 26 | 6:30 - 8 p.m.

HOMAGE TO A HERO - HARRIET TUBMAN
Milton J. Womack Park
Feb. 27 | 10:30 a.m.-noon

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Walmart Hosts COVID-19 Community Vaccine Event in Louisiana



BATON ROUGE, La. — Walmart will begin administering Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines in Baton Rouge with a drive thru clinic at the Walmart Supercenter at 9350 Cortana Place starting Feb. 25th through the U.S. Federal Retail Pharmacy Program. Eligible patients can schedule a vaccine appointment via the Walmart website, making it convenient to get vaccinated while vaccine supplies last. Vaccines will be available to those who meet the current phase of vaccine eligibility in Louisiana which can be found at the State of Louisiana Health Department website.

Insurance is not required, there is no cost to receive the vaccine, and appointments for the second vaccination will be made while at the first appointment. Walmart anticipates these events will take place over the next several weeks as allocation allows.

Walmart is holding vaccine events in locations that prioritize access for those deemed most vulnerable, as well as operational capabilities. The team factored in demographic information, local health needs, staffing and medically underserved data to identify initial locations where the company thinks it can make the greatest impact in increasing vaccine access.

"We have two goals as we administer vaccines: first, to get

as many shots in eligible arms as possible so we can start the process of reopening our country, and second, ensuring equitable vaccine access across the communities we serve," Dr. Cheryl Pegus, Executive Vice President, Health & Wellness, said. "We will continue finding new ways to increase vaccination access for our customers as we work towards the eventual end of the pandemic."

Walmart is partnering with CDC and states to move as quickly as possible to help administer vaccines to eligible populations in 35 participating states, Puerto Rico and District of Columbia. Vaccine supply and eligibility will vary based on state and local guidelines. In addition to appointments, the scheduler will provide a digital reminder when it is time to return for the second vaccine, which is why customers are asked to create a profile, helping to ensure customers receive the second dose of the vaccine in the timeframe required.

Walmart pharmacies will continue to support states, jurisdictions and the federal government to help increase the accessibility and availability of COVID-19 vaccines. To stay up to date on how Walmart and Sam's Club are supporting the vaccine rollout, visit <https://corporate.walmart.com/covid-vaccine>.

Girl Scout Cookie Season Kicks Off in Southeast Louisiana, Bringing Joy During Challenging Times



NEW ORLEANS, La. — Today, Girl Scouts Louisiana East and Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) kicked off the 2021 Girl Scout Cookie season nationally, during a challenging time when many Girl Scouts are selling in creative, socially distant, and contact-free ways to keep themselves and their customers safe. Even in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, girls are adapting their sales methods to share the joy of Girl Scout Cookies through the largest girl-led entrepreneurship program — including taking contact-free pickup and delivery orders through a new national collaboration with Grubhub. Additionally, GSUSA is making online cookie ordering available nationwide on February 1 so consumers who don't know a Girl Scout can still purchase cookies from a local troop for direct shipment to their homes or donation to local organizations.

Innovative Girl-led Sales Methods

The Girl Scout Cookie Program has long taught girls how to run a business via in-person booths, door-to-door activity, and the Digital Cookie® platform online, which GSUSA launched in 2014. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the middle of the 2020, girls in southeast Louisiana were inspired to act by hosting canned food drives, sewing masks for their communities, and donating cookies to frontline workers. This year, girls as young as five years old are continuing to embrace their entrepreneurial spirits, stay connected to their communities, and have fun by participating in the cookie program. And, the proceeds from each and every purchase stay local with the troop and its council to power Girl Scouts' essential leadership programming.

"People will notice some delightful changes to the way we do cookie season this year. With more emphasis on using technology and using girl-powered creative solutions such as innovative drive-thru cookie booths, we hope our communities will support their local Girl Scouts with the same energy and excitement as they have in years past," says Rebecca Pennington, CEO of Girl Scouts Louisiana East. This year, Girl Scouts is also providing new materials as part of their cookie badge program to support girls as they run their cookie business online and via social media, helping them be best equipped to sell during these times.

Ordering Now Available Through Delivery Platform Grubhub

See COOKIES, on page 5

Mayor Broome's ACAO Veneeth Iyengar To Lead Louisiana's Broadband Development Effort

BATON ROUGE, La. — Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome announced the resignation of Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Veneeth Iyengar today with his last day in the administration on March 26, 2021.

Iyengar will be taking on a new position leading the state's efforts around Broadband Development & Connectivity.

Iyengar first joined the administration on January 1, 2018 and was responsible for leading the administration's efforts around Economic Development, Small Business and building innovative public-private partnerships.

He was often tasked to work with the private sector to solve many of the community's most pressing issues around disinvestment, revitalization of assets, and responding to the business community's needs around the pandemic.

"Veneeth was often the tip of the spear for leading projects that benefit our community. From revitalizing the Howell Place Medical Complex, to executing the partnership with eBay for their Retail Revival Program and coming up with tactical solutions to help small businesses impacted by the pandemic, his work will be felt for years to come," said Mayor Broome. "I greatly appreciate his efforts and thank him for the unwavering dedication to the city and parish throughout the years. On behalf of everyone at City-Parish, I wish Veneeth the very best as he is once again called to serve our community, but this time on behalf of the people of the state of Louisiana."

PRISON from page 2

bars in the world, and a disproportionate amount are people of color. We need a complete overhaul to reform the system and end this cycle that tears apart our communities. That begins with making sure the corrections system is about justice and redemption, not private profiteering off of punishment."

CLINIC from page 1

community partners will be in attendance Friday to highlight the importance of equitable access to the vaccine.

This clinic will offer 2,200 vaccinations to residents of North Baton Rouge and the surrounding area in a model partnership between the Louisiana Department of Health, the city of Baton Rouge, the

East Baton Rouge Council on Aging, Albertsons and Ochsner Health System, Living Faith Christian Center, the Legislative Black Caucus, the Governor's Health Equity Task Force and the Louisiana National Guard.

The clinic is an example of the Louisiana Department of Health and Baton Rouge community partners' ongoing efforts to provide access in underserved areas to persons eligible for the vaccine.

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RELIGION

Hopes Trap Track, "The Ride," Will Make Fans Finally See Him As An Adult

Singer-songwriter, Bryan Andrew Wilson, known for recent gospel songs such as "Turning Away" and the No. 1 hit "Overflow," is driving into a new musical direction. The Atlanta-based artist who launched his career at the age of ten with the traditional hymn, "His Eye is on the Sparrow" (Malaco Records), is tossing that old time religion for Trap music on his new single, "The Ride" (Bryan's Songs/The Orchard).



Bryan Andrew Wilson

The mid-tempo Urban Pop groove was produced by Awaz Beatz and The Exclusives who have collaborated with superstars such as DJ Khaled, August Alsina and Avicii. "I know that when people hear the music, they are going to say I've left the church because this style of music still isn't fully embraced in the church," Wilson laughs. "This is the music of NOW. When you listen to the words of the song, it's all about surrendering the steering wheel of your life to God and letting him drive you to your destiny. What's wrong with that message? A few radio people have said they won't play the song because they don't think the Trap vibe is sacred. That just means it's not for them but hopefully it's for some other people who are open to a new sound."

Wilson is also hoping that the stark difference in his current music and that of his childhood will finally allow him to grow up in the eyes of his fans. "I'm in my 30s now with half a dozen hit songs as an

adult," Wilson says. "Yet, so many people still want to see me as the little kid who sang with the Mississippi Children's Choir. They want me to sing that song just like I did back then before puberty kicked-in. I'm happy to have that history and those millions of streams., but I also want people to hear my current music because it's just as relevant and meaningful in my opinion."

Fan Listening Link: <https://orcd.co/theridesingle>

Knock, Knock; Someone's in Trouble

DR. JAMES L. SNYDER

For some reason, the last several weeks we have been getting many visitors at our door. I'm not sure if this is a general trend or if it is just our door.

Some of them have been salesmen, religious people, scam artists, and a host of other people. They only had one goal in mind, and that was to get our money.

Money we have not, and the more they pester us for our money, the more frustration we acquire. If they want frustration, we have plenty of that and are more than happy to give it to them.

When someone calls on the phone, you can always hang up or not even answer it. When somebody knocks on your door, you do not have that kind of choice. You do not know who is there or what they want.

It might be somebody scoping the neighborhood for a house to rob.

Because my wife knows everybody in the neighborhood, as soon as someone knocks at our door and almost before the door is closed, she has texted everybody on the street to be aware of someone coming to knock on the door. It is great when a neighborhood hangs together.

A few weeks ago, it was getting terrible. Almost every day, someone was at the door knocking. I usually handle the phone calls,



and she handles the door.

I could see she was getting frustrated, and I understood, quite severely.

She just finished making our lunch, and we just sat down and began to enjoy our lunch together.

Then, someone knocked at the door.

My wife sighed very deeply and said, "Whoever that is, I'm going to give them a piece of my mind. I'm tired of this."

Although we had prayed for our lunch, I was now ready to pray

for whoever was at the front door.

On several occasions, I have had a piece of her mind. It's not a pretty sight. She has enough mind to give to many people, and I was very concerned about the people at the front door.

"I don't care who you are. I don't care what you're selling. I don't want it, and I want you to leave and never come back again."

With that, he slammed the door shut and walked away.

"Who was at the door?" She just looked at me and then

said, "I don't know, but I gave them a piece of my mind."

I was chuckling underneath, trying not to let it come to the surface for any recognition.

"Are you sure," I said as serious as I could maintain, "that you gave them the right piece of your mind?"

She just stared at me, "What do you mean?"

"Are you sure you did not give them the left piece of your mind?"

See **KNOCK, KNOCK**, on page 5

CHURCH DIRECTORY

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. - Hebrews 10:25

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Bible Study Wed. 12:00 Noon and 5:00 p.m.
Prayer Ministry Tues 6:00 p.m.

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Sunday Worship Experience: 11:00 AM
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Rev. Leo Cyrus Sr., Pastor
CHURCH SCHEDULE

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Lord's Supper 3rd Sundays
Sunday School 9:30 AM
Prayer Service Wed. @ 6:00 PM
Bible Study Wed- @ 7:00 PM

Mission Statement: New Hope Baptist Church is a family of baptized believers who worship the Lord our God in spirit and in truth, teach the saved to reach the lost and minister to the needs of others, while encouraging one another through acts of love and living in obedience to Gods Word

SU Ag Center gears up for its 2021 Virtual Livestock Experience

BATON ROUGE, La.—The Southern University Ag Center will host its 2021 Virtual Livestock Experience on March 25 from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. via Zoom.

This free event is open to all youth. Animals are not required to participate.

During the experience, participants will receive information from current livestock show judges and educators on animal selection, feeding and proper facilities for swine, cattle, sheep, goats, and much more.

The administration of the Southern University Ag Center recommended hosting a virtual Livestock Experience instead of the traditional Livestock and Poultry Show to keep our exhibitors, supporters, and staff safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We still wanted to have an event for the youth of Louisi-

ana to learn and benefit from as they continue to raise animals for years to come,” said Dr. Harold Mellieon, Jr., Livestock Show Director for the Southern University Ag Center. “Having speakers and presenters that are also judges and educators sharing the information with the participants is also a huge benefit because the youth will be able to see how making small changes in their husbandry practices can make a difference in the show ring. And with this being virtual, our participants and their families can be in the safety of their home, absorbing all of the information and asking questions to prepare for the 80th annual show in 2022,” added Mellieon.

Registration is required to participate, to register for the Virtual Livestock Experience visit <http://bit.ly/3b7FtV1>.

COOKIES from page 3

This season, Girl Scouts Louisiana East is participating in a national collaboration with food ordering and delivery platform Grubhub so girls have an additional way to facilitate contact-free cookie orders. In southeast Louisiana, consumers can order Girl Scout Cookies for pickup or delivery on Grubhub.com or the Grubhub app. A hands-on experience in managing e-commerce, local Girl Scouts will track and fulfill orders, manage inventory, and more, all using Grubhub's back-end technology. This method will be available in New Orleans and Baton Rouge on Thursday, Feb. 25 and ending Sunday, March 14. As always, the proceeds benefit the troop and council while providing another innovative way to safely run the cookie program virtually. GSUSA is grateful to Grubhub for waiving all fees for the organization to make this new delivery option feasible for sales without reducing proceeds to troops and GSLE.

GSUSA is making it possible for all consumers nation-

wide who don't already know a Girl Scout to purchase Girl Scout Cookies online for shipment to their door. Beginning Monday, Feb. 1, customers can enter their zip code into the Girl Scout Cookie Finder to find a local troop to purchase from through the Digital Cookie platform for direct shipment or donation to local organizations. This additional contact-free method supports local girls while keeping their safety and skill building top of mind.

This year, Girl Scouts Louisiana East will offer the new Toast-Yay!™ cookie, a French toast-inspired cookie dipped in delicious icing and full of flavor in every bite. Toast-Yay! gives consumers a new way to celebrate moments of joy alongside other favorites, like Thin Mints® and Caramel deLites®. And though social distancing measures may keep families and friends apart, cookie customers can share joy and stay connected this season through a gift-box option that ships directly to others via the Digital Cookie platform.

KNOCK, KNOCK from page 4

She finally smiled and then said, “No, I'm saving that piece for you.”

I was smiling on the outside but not on the inside. I was honored that she has a special piece of her mind for me, but I have no idea what it will be and when it will come my way.

I thought of the Scripture along this line. “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke

6:31).

I think this is hard to do for many reasons. God can give me the strength to do this for his honor and glory.

Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, 1471 Pine Road, Ocala, FL 34472. He lives with his wife in Silver Springs Shores. Call him at 352-687-4240 or e-mail james-snyder2@att.net. The church web site is www.whatafellow-

BUSINESS

5 tips to set your business up for success in 2021

The challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic hardships can make 2020 a difficult year to look back on. 46% of small business owners surveyed in the Q4 Wells Fargo Small Business Index reported decreases in revenues, while the prospect of closing their business was most frequently ranked as the top concern. Nonetheless, even the most challenging times can yield opportunities for the future. 2020 provided hard truths, but also valuable insights that small business owners can use at the outset of 2021 to move forward.

Get online

Nearly one third (29%) of businesses planned to start using a website in 2020.1 Luckily for those that followed through on that plan, 2020 showed that having a strong online presence, user experience and functionality can not only be a competitive advantage in the marketplace, but also critical to a business's survival. 86% of consumers rely on the internet to find a local business.2 With a well-rounded digital strategy, including a website and social media, business owners can build awareness and leverage how people are searching for information online. Further, ensuring a positive user experience with these channels can help set up an environment for business growth.

Key questions:

- Is my website mobile friendly?
- Can customers place orders or make payments online?
- Are my hours and contact information up to date?
- Take advantage of digital banking

Online and mobile banking can help business owners monitor and manage their accounts from anywhere and make analyzing cash flow easier. In fact, 73% of small businesses utilize these services, according to Barlow Research. What 2020 exhibited is the ability of this functionality to help in preparing for uncertain circumstances, such as not being able to visit a physical bank branch for an extended period. Utilizing tools like these can provide extra insurance against potential challenges that may arise.

Key Questions:

- Am I using all of the available features for my online banking service?
 - Is my accounting software up to date and synced with my bank accounts?
 - Have I downloaded any requisite applications so I can use tools like mobile deposit?
 - Check your tech
- Almost one third (29%) of business owners said in November 2020 that the closure of their business was their top concern, while 57% said they did not an-



The possibility of not seeing economic or business recovery until at least mid-2021 highlights the importance of planning for multiple scenarios.

icipate recovery for businesses like theirs until at least the second half of 2021. With recent surges in COVID-19 cases, one key thing business owners can do to withstand these challenges and to help safeguard negative impacts to the business down the line is to ensure the right technology is fully utilized to serve operations, including sufficient internet bandwidth and wireless capabilities.

Key Questions:

- Can I use accounting software to better analyze sales, costs, and opportunities in 2021?
- Is my accounting software synced to my bank accounts?
- Can I use social media or a client-relationship manager to get to know my customers better?
- Join a professional organization

Networking can help small business owners through crises like COVID-19 and help facilitate a

potential reset or even rebuilding of a business in the coming year. Whether it's a traditional chamber of commerce or networking group or an online or social media-based

community, networking groups can provide ideas and resources for growth, and may also help with recruiting talent, finding vendors, or even generating sales.



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SPORTS

Former LSU Star Gymnast Named Associate AD for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

BATON ROUGE, La. - Former LSU star gymnast Ashleigh Clare-Kearney Thigpen has been named the new LSU Associate Athletic Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion the school's Athletic Director Scott Woodward announced on Friday, Feb. 26.

Thigpen was a two-time NCAA Champion and volunteer coach for the LSU Gymnastics team.

"I am thrilled about Ashleigh's new role within our athletic department," Woodward said. "As a highly decorated student-athlete, a volunteer assistant coach, and as an attorney and law professor at Southern University, she has represented the very best of LSU Athletics, and there is no one more prepared or better qualified to help lead our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts."

Thigpen will assist Woodward and the LSU Athletics senior staff with monitoring progress on the department's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and implementing human resources initiatives related to staff training, education, and professional development.

"I am grateful that LSU Athletics has trusted me to lead the department in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives," Thigpen said. "LSU is an incredible place to be and we are capable of making it better by placing equitable values at the core of everything we do. Our goal is to eliminate bias, promote diversity, and become a leader in education and best practices."

In her role, Thigpen will lead the evolution of the athletic department's culture in which diversity, equity and inclusion are at the forefront. Her efforts will directly impact the recruitment, hiring, training, development and retention of underrepresented and marginalized individuals. She will work alongside the LSU Athletics Business office to grow the diverse supplier program, assist with climate surveys, and monitor the impact of diversity and inclusion programs and initiatives.

Thigpen will also assist in the tracking of compliance of all trainings with special efforts in compliance of Title IX and sexual assault education and training. She will be involved in LSU Athletics' comprehensive effort and commitment to



Ashleigh Clare-Kearney Thigpen

increase awareness of sexual and domestic violence and work alongside leadership to ensure a healthy and respectful climate among coaches, staff and student-athletes.

"With the efforts of the entire department, we will strive to continue to make all student-athletes, coaches and staff feel validated and heard," Thigpen added. "Through the lens of equality, we will continue to make LSU an inviting place to experience."

One of LSU's most accomplished student-athletes, Thigpen earned her bachelor's degree in 2008 and master's degree in 2010. She went on to earn her Juris Doctor from the Southern University Law Center in 2013. She has been working as an attorney for the Louisiana House of Representatives the past five years.

In addition to her work with the state, Thigpen has also served as an adjunct professor at Southern University. Since 2013, Thigpen has worked in private practice in the areas of family law, contracts, personal injury and employment discrimination.

While a student-athlete, Thigpen demonstrated excellence

and leadership in competition and in the classroom. She was the 2009 NCAA vault and floor champion, LSU's first two-time champion. As a junior in 2008, Thigpen became the second LSU gymnast to be crowned the SEC all-around Champion, and she also took home 2008 SEC Gymnast of the Year honors.

Thigpen holds the school record for the most individual titles - winning 114 titles in her career, including 37 on vault, 27 on floor and 22 in the all-around. She was also recognized as a Scholastic All-American in both 2008 and 2009, and the Manchester, Connecticut, native was also a two-time SEC Academic Honor Roll member.

An active member in the local community, Thigpen was twice recognized as a member of the SEC Community Service Team, and she also received the 2008 Huel D. Perkins Leadership Award at LSU. Because of her prowess in the gym, in the classroom and in the community, Thigpen became the first LSU student-athlete to earn the distinction as an NCAA Woman of the Year Finalist in 2009.

Southern vs. Alabama State Odds, Line, Spread: 2021 FCS College Football Picks, Predictions From Proven Expert

The Southern University Jaguars and Alabama State Hornets meet in a Southwestern Athletic Conference crossover matchup on Friday. The game kicks off the FCS spring schedule for both teams. Southern (8-5, 6-1 in 2019) has won four in a row in the series, including a 64-6 triumph in 2016, the last time the schools met. Alabama State (5-6, 4-3) is looking for its second season-opening win over the past three seasons. The Hornets beat Tuskegee in 2018 before falling to UAB last year.

Kickoff from ASU Stadium in

Montgomery, Ala., is set for 7 p.m. ET. Southern University leads the all-time series 28-12. The Jaguars are seven-point favorites in the latest Southern University vs. Alabama State odds from William Hill Sportsbook, while the over-under for total points scored is set at 51.5. Before making your Alabama State vs. Southern University picks, you'll want to see the latest college football predictions and betting advice from SportsLine's Emory Hunt.

Hunt is the founder and CEO of Football Gameplan, which has been supplying analysis of all lev-

els of football since 2007, and a former running back at Louisiana-Lafayette. He knows the game from a player's perspective, and is a specialist when it comes to picking all levels of college football. He enjoyed a dominant 2019 season, going 116-79 against the spread while returning nearly \$3,000 to \$100 bettors.

Now, Hunt has set his sights on Southern vs. Alabama State. You can head to SportsLine to see its picks. Here are several college football odds for Alabama State vs. Southern:

Southern University vs. Alabama State spread: Southern -7

Southern University vs. Alabama State over-under: 51.5 points
Southern University vs. Alabama State money line: Southern University -290, Alabama State +235

SU: The Jaguars averaged 228.6 rushing yards per game last season

ASU: Long snapper Luke Barnes was named to the Special Teams U All-American selection watch list, one of five FCS players to earn the honor

Why Southern University can cover

The Jaguars return their third-leading receiver in senior wideout Jamar Washington, who caught 25 passes for 341 yards (13.6 average) and two touchdowns last season. He also rushed 26 times for 197 yards (7.6 average) and three TDs. He caught at least two passes in nine of 12 games, including a five-catch, 109-yard and one touchdown performance against Florida A&M. He also rushed for one TD and caught a touchdown pass against Texas Southern, finishing with 91

all-purpose yards.

Defensively, Southern returns its second-leading tackler in redshirt senior linebacker Caleb Carter. He played in all 13 games in 2019, finishing with 81 tackles, including a team-leading 44 solo. He also registered 4 1/2 tackles for loss for 20 yards, recorded one sack, six quarterback hurries, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery. In 2018, he played in all 11 games for the Jaguars, recording 38 tackles, one sack, one interception, two quarterback hurries and one fumble recovery.



SLEEVES UP

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