

**By**

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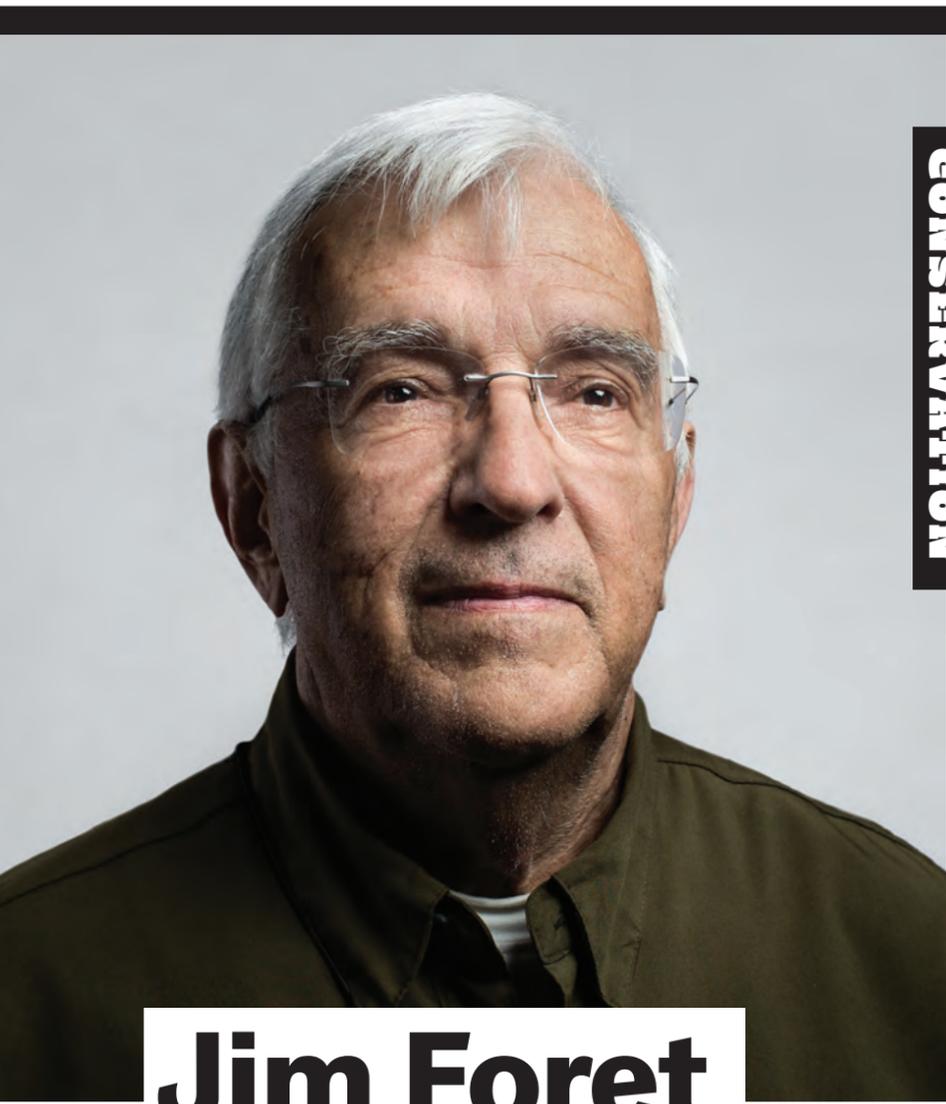
**Portraits By**

Romero & Romero

Acadiana is a region steeped in history, culture and tradition and its people are known for their irrepressible and entrepreneurial spirit. It is with this idea in mind that we created the Acadiana Profile Trailblazers. Some of the honorees are people you've come to know for accomplishments in

their industry or in the community. Others are either newer to their professions or have struck out on a new path — in either case, they are making waves. Acadiana Profile is thrilled to honor these trailblazing Acadianians and highlight the work they are doing in this one-of-a-kind place.

# THE ACADIANA PROFILE TRAILBLAZERS



CONSERVATION

# Jim Foret

For almost 50 years, Jim Foret has been the go-to guy for advice on anything having to do with trees. In addition to his work as a consulting arborist, he is a certified expert witness on horticulture and arboriculture in U.S. district courts, where his testimony can help resolve a landowner's lawsuit over trees that have been damaged or felled by another, whether by accident or design.

At the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, he teaches courses on plant science, urban tree management, native plants, landscape plants and environmental landscape design. He is a past president of the Louisiana Native Plant Society and is involved with many environmental organizations, including the Louisiana Urban Forestry Council and the Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society.

For 11 years he was superintendent of parks in New Iberia, where he created all-weather walking paths and greatly expanded educational and recreational activities for the 16-park system. After Hurricane Andrew, he obtained funding to plant 1,300 trees in the city's parks and public spaces. He established the annual Festival of Live Oaks in City Park, and during the springtime Books Along The Teche Literary Festival, he conducts a tree walk focusing on the magnificent live oaks in the downtown historic district.

The beautiful spring wildflowers along Highway 90 and I-49 near Lafayette are there because of work Foret has done with the Wildflower Seed Bank project, in cooperation with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. On the ULL campus, his students created a 400-square-foot mini-prairie landscaped with native plants.

Of all he's accomplished, Foret is proudest of his efforts to make people realize how important the natural world is. His students are increasingly aware and knowledgeable about the environment, and that gives him hope for the future. —Stanley Dry

## PERFORMING ARTS

# Sarah Gauthier Roy

Combining her love for her culture and the theater, Sarah Gauthier Roy has provided a solution to a heretofore unanswered question: Where can children fluent in French, thanks to immersion, use that language outside the classroom?

The Carencro native is a trained thespian with a degree in performing arts from UL-Lafayette. She spent 20 years as an actor locally and nationally. As is the case with many young Cajuns, she did not learn to fully appreciate the culture of Acadiana until moving away, in her case to California. Upon returning to Louisiana, Gauthier made it her mission to immerse herself in the local arts scene. Inspired by the Cajun French works of Barry Ancelet and Kirby Jambon, Gauthier set out to create a business, Theatre Acadie, which fulfills a need in the community.

As with many successful enterprises, Gauthier builds upon another trailblazing tradition that began long ago. Le Théâtre 'Cadien was the first Cajun French language theater troupe that produced a string of plays in the '80s. While those actors were native French-speakers, Theatre Acadie caters to the next generation of Franco-Louisianans who learned in school. Working with local Francophones, the aspiring actors learn the local dialect, in addition to the formal French they hear in school. Molière meets Mamou, if you will.

Gauthier's own children, along with many others, can now learn confidence by performing in the language of our ancestors. In that sense, she is offering a unique opportunity for the development of our culture's future storytellers. Through classes, workshops, summer camps in French, she is building a new community of young French speakers in Acadiana. The gratitude Gauthier experiences from those who appreciate her work and understand its potential for growth keeps her exploring new ways to bring back our heritage language. —David Cheramie



# Will McGrew and Drake LeBlanc



Like many a good story, it began over a glass of beer or two. The meeting of Drake LeBlanc, a filmmaker from Lafayette, and Will McGrew, an entrepreneur from New Orleans, lead to Télé-Louisiane, a French-language media company that now produces children's cartoons and interviews on a YouTube channel.

They also provide translation services to ensure the language has a visible presence. The duo is currently working with the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area to make all its communications are in French with plans to expand to more traditional forms of media. But for now, they are creating content for a new generation of Louisiana francophones.

McGrew finds inspiration for the work from history, citing Louisianans such as Huey P. Long, Homer Plessy and Richard Guidry, who "had their strengths and weaknesses but realized that the people of state are exceptional and deserve more both culturally and economically." His grandmother also serves as inspiration to his work.

"An immigrant from Galicia in Spain, who proudly embraced the language and cultures of her native region, Galicia; her countries, Spain and U.S.; and her new home Louisiana, proudly speaking French, Spanish, Galician-Galego and English and taking part in Louisianiste organizations like L'Athénée Louisianais et les Causeries du Lundi," said McGrew.

LeBlanc also didn't have to look far.

"I was mainly inspired by my dad who independently produced films and his own TV show when I was younger," said LeBlanc. "That led me to where I am today, owner of a flourishing photography and film production company."

Along with the people in their respective families, those throughout the region motivate both McGrew and LeBlanc in their shared vision, which fuels their creativity. So, it comes as no surprise that a mutual acquaintance saw the fire in both men and urged them to connect.

"[A friend of mine] then at the Alliance Française de Lafayette, said he had the ideal business partner for me, who would be an ideal creative director [and] lead for Télé-Louisiane and would be able to work with me to realize the full creative and financial potential of the company," said McGrew.

Telling the stories of Acadianians isn't just a creative outlet for either of the two men however. Their vision has a deeper drive at its heart.

"For our resilient people, for our endangered language and culture, for our economy in desperate need of diversification, and for our rapidly disappearing land," said McGrew. "Reimagining a prosperous future for the state built upon the talent of our people, the richness of our shared culture and the beauty of our natural environment is not just a matter of dreaming big, it is a matter of survival." — **David Cheramie**

## Business



### MEGAN ARCENEUX

As the saying goes, don't put all your crawfish in the same basket, even if it is between the handlebars of a classic beach cruiser bicycle. Or at least that's how it should go in the case of business trailblazer Megan Arceneaux.

The entrepreneurial spirit that has driven her to run two successful businesses did not come to her by chance. Some may say it's difficult to find, but everyone has heard of Hawk's Crawfish restaurant. L.H. "Hawk" Arceneaux was her grandfather, a farmer before going into the purged crawfish business. He created many jobs for his family and the community.

Growing up in Rayne, Arceneaux learned the value of hard work and taking pride in serving such a high-quality product that people will go off the beaten path to find it. For the directionally challenged crawfish aficionado, Hawk's Boil Up follows the "pop-up restaurant" business model. It makes their mudbugs easier to find by bringing the succulent crustaceans to the customers. Arceneaux's love and admiration for her grandfather, "the greatest man in the world" as she calls him, also encouraged her to emulate those who can lead and help others around them. Another such man was Ray Johnson of Johnson's Bike Shop in Lafayette. There Arceneaux learned how he and his brother not only repaired and built bikes, but also how they treated their customers. They, too, were men who sought to make their community better.

Owned and run by Arceneaux, Hub City Cycles in downtown Lafayette is today that same kind of place where you can buy or repair your bike, and maybe burn off the calories from the five pounds of crawfish with potatoes and corn you bought from her boil up. Making a living out of these two seemingly disparate trades only doubles the smiles Arceneaux loves to put on people's faces. — **David Cheramie**



### FRANCIS X. PAVY

As far back as he can remember, Francis X. Pavy has wanted to be an artist. Introduced at an early age to drawing and painting, he soon began figuring out how to get his hands to produce what he was seeing with his mind's eye. It was not long before Pavy began developing his love for color, how to mix it, how to analyze it, how one related to another. The vibrancy of his artistry is one of the hallmarks of his work today.

The richness of Pavy's work comes from a variety of sources. He learned of Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Pablo Picasso, even if he did not know their names at the time, while thumbing through magazines, encyclopedias and library books. Abstract expressionism was all the rage in those days: That dynamism has found its way into Pavy's creations that tell a story wherever the gaze may fall.

Pavy's paintings are in the collections of famous people from around the globe. Even though he has an international reputation in the art world, his groundbreaking artwork is as much a part of Acadiana as two-stepping, button accordions or chicken chasing. What makes Pavy's work unique is that he has created a new visual language that is unmistakably home grown in Acadiana, juxtaposing images of Zydeco dancers, telephone poles, guitars, palmetto leaves and even tufts of marsh grass in a joyful explosion of color.

As he puts it, he feels "like an archeologist uncovering some hidden artifacts." His originality is such that once you seen a Pavy, you will never mistake any of his works for someone else's. The multitude of motifs keep looping back like the familiar lyrics to your favorite song. If you listen closely enough, you might be able to hear it. — David Cheramie

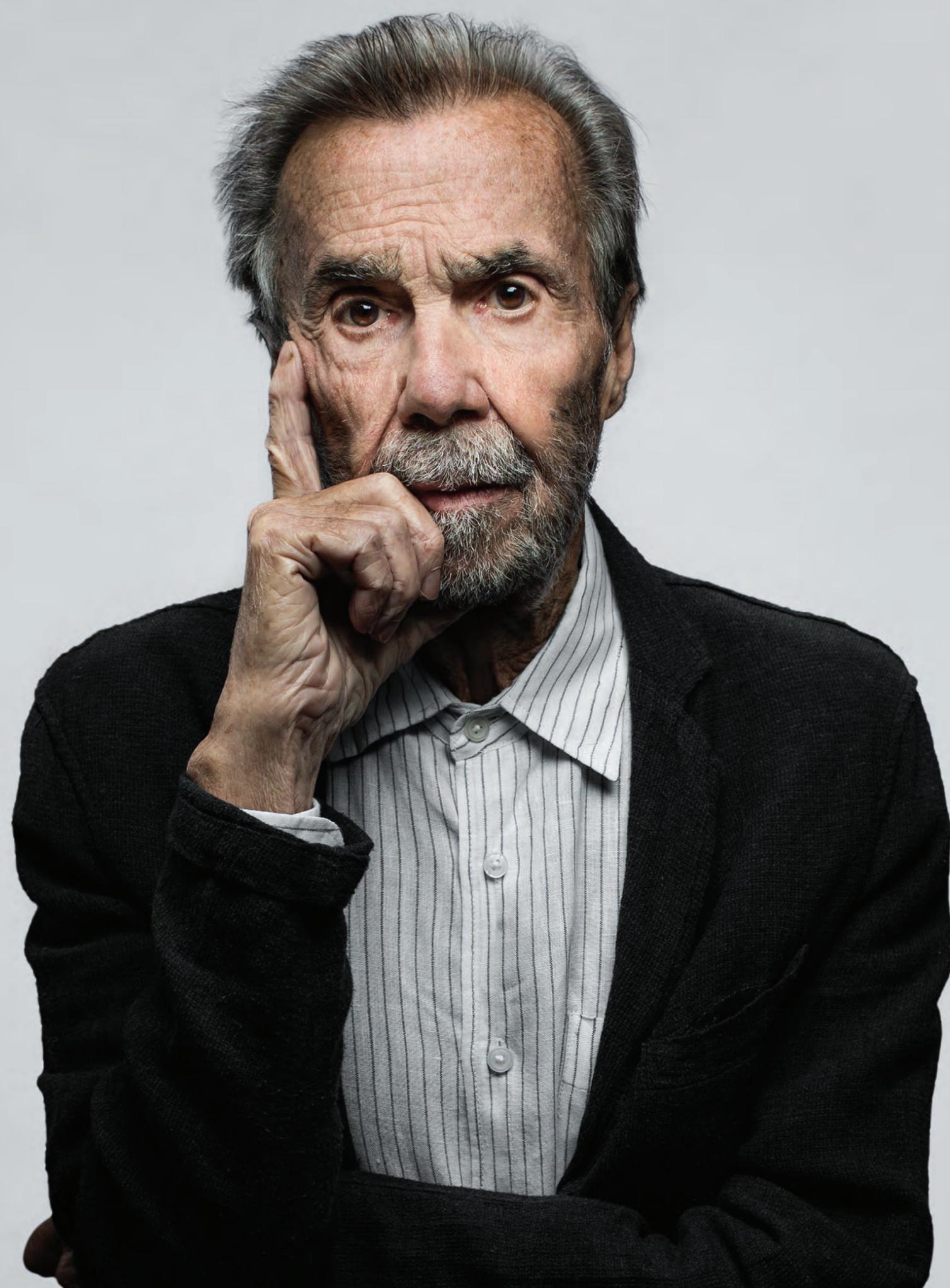
### MUSIC

## Dickie Landry

Going from milking cows before dawn to playing saxophone in a legendary avant-garde ensemble is not a trail many could blaze, but Cecilia native Dickie Landry did. You may not know his name, but you probably have heard of some of his collaborators who became his friends: Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, Robert Rauschenberg and the Talking Heads' Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth. This too-short list of all the famous and talented artists and musicians he encountered while living in New York during its artistic halcyon days of the '70s gives you a small idea of Landry's level of artistry. He has excelled in such a diverse array of artistic expression that the term "Renaissance man" does not even begin to describe him.

An accomplished photographer, Landry was able to document the works of many important artists of that time. As a solo musician, he'd play jazz improvisations while walking around art galleries, an innovative performance strategy for the time. In recent years, Landry has been a member of the swamp pop supergroup Lii' Band O' Gold and performed with the reggae group, True Man Posse. His breadth of creativity is only matched by its longevity.

The work ethic instilled in him on his family farm, the Gregorian chants sung in church and his brother's saxophone all sent him on this incredible journey which has brought him back to where he began. Landry's fascination with experimental sound started as a young boy as he would listen to the electric hum of newly installed powerlines. He would end up performing "Oedipus Rex" in an ancient Greek amphitheater. Until he can return to the stage post-COVID-19, you are likely to find him back at the farm, on his tractor, picking pecans, clearing brush or just thinking up new music in his head. — David Cheramie





## Ken & Andrea Veron

**The restaurant business** is, by its very nature, one of sharing and community. Optimism, compassion and humility are the main ingredients. You need to muscle through the tough times. In the production of the guest experience, the creation of connections and relationships, not to mention a mouth-watering menu, are essential. Not to mention having to navigate a labyrinth of problems. It is more than just managing the front and back of house. You need a team that shows up every day and leaders like Ken and Andrea Veron to inspire them.

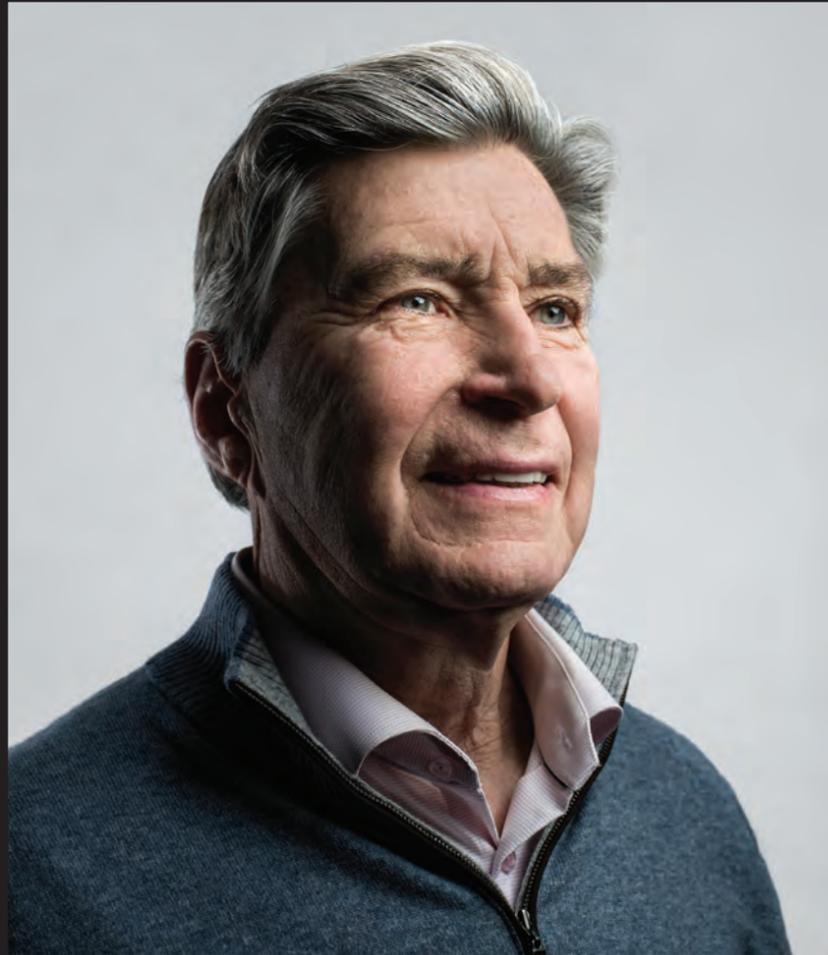
This couple's trail begins just down the road from where Lafayette began along

the banks of the Vermilion River. It was once a flourishing trading post known as Petit Manchac. In a house built circa 1835 — shortly after the founding of Vermilionville, today Lafayette — they offer fine dining in the eponymous and historic Café Vermilionville. These times have been the most challenging in an already difficult business, but thanks to their combined talents, they are setting the pace. With Ken's background — he comes from a restaurant family, his father having founded the restaurant in the early '80s — combined with Andrea's expertise in historic preservation, running a restaurant in a nearly two-hundred-year-old house is a natural fit.

Combined with a seasonal outdoor concert series and innovative takes on classic dishes, the duo joins the old and the new.

At a time when it seems like restaurateurs are bending over backwards trying to find a novel concept, the Verons have reinvigorated the tried-and-true formula of great food with impeccable service and fabulous atmosphere.

Whether they are serving hospitality, Oysters Herbsaint or comradeship, the Verons are ready to welcome you as you blaze a trail of your own to the Café Vermilionville near the banks of where it all began. — **David Cheramie**



### MATT STULLER

The little things in life often add up and so it is with communities. A single person may not think their discarded cigarette or fast food wrapper is a big deal, but when the majority people think that way, streets and neighborhoods can begin to look filthy. This can cause property values to drop and make people and businesses less likely to want to move to the area. It's why Matt Stuller started Parish Proud: to make Lafayette's neighborhoods as beautiful as the people who live in them.

Stuller owns Stuller, Inc., a fine jewelry manufacturer in Lafayette. Once he started his business, he traveled more and saw that other cities in the United States and across the world were much cleaner than Lafayette. So, he started Parish Proud in an effort to beautify his beloved hometown. How do you do that? Education through social media, radio and TV campaigns. When people see others behaving a certain way, they're likely to follow suit.

"You have to have education in order to change behavior," Stuller said. "We have to get people to take notice of the fact that we do not have to live this way."

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented new challenges to Parish Proud's efforts. Stuller said the rise in people eating in their cars after getting food at the drive-thru plus the number of people using disposable masks means a lot more people are discarding trash (including masks) on the street. Because of the pandemic, people are also more hesitant to touch things someone else may have contaminated. So good Samaritans are less likely to pick up litter they see on the street.

Despite these challenges, Stuller said improvements have been made over the years and he is confident Lafayette can keep the momentum. Even though litter has frustrated him, he loves Acadiana intensely.

"I can live anyplace in the world I want to," Stuller said. "But at the age of 70, I continue to live in and love Lafayette, Louisiana." — **Fritz Esker**

### EDUCATION

## Terysa Ridgeway

When she was growing up in Sunset, Louisiana (population approximately 2500) in the early-mid 1990s, Terysa Ridgeway's mother would bring home an Apple computer for the summer from the school where she taught. Ridgeway was fascinated by the computer, which gave way to a lifelong love affair with computers and science.

Ridgeway has shared her passion with local students, working with children (grades 6-12) in smaller and underprivileged communities on things like basic computer skills and developing phone apps. Since she came from a small town, Ridgeway wants to give children like her a chance to learn everything she knows. She said giving these children a solid foundation in computer skills is crucial because computer science is like art in many ways. Once you learn the basics, you can be creative and innovative, but you have to learn the building blocks first.

Many of the kids lack confidence at first, but Ridgeway helps them build faith in themselves as they learn.

"Introducing technology to kids, you see the fear in their eyes. You see the shyness in their eyes, but then you see the excitement grow," Ridgeway said. "It's like watching a butterfly being born."

In 2020, Ridgeway, who has a husband and four children under the age of 10, began working for Google as a technical program manager. Since her job began during the pandemic, she has been able to remain in Louisiana and work remotely. So far, the work has been going great.

"It's everything I always expected it to be," Ridgeway said.

Acadiana will always hold a special place in Ridgeway's heart. A genealogy buff, Ridgeway can trace six generations of her family back to the same square mile of land she grew up on in Sunset. — **Fritz Esker**

