

THE

HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

March 2020

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, March 19, 2020, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Ken Murphy whose topic will be “My books and my goals using photos and books.” He will also have copies of the following books for sale (\$25 each) *My South Coast Home, Mississippi, Mississippi: State of Blues, Jackson (Mississippi), and Local Spirit. Reservations are required* and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, February 19,** to make your reservation in order to help us plan seating which is limited to fifty-four people and to apprise us of the number of lunches to order. **Served at noon, lunch is \$14.00 for members and \$15.00 for nonmembers,** payable at the door. It is catered by Almost Home Catering, Michelle Nichols, chef. The lunch menu is pan seared pork chops, yellow rice, strawberry salad, key lime pie cups, and rolls.

ARTS ALIVE!

The Arts, Hancock County presents the 18th Annual Arts Alive Festival bringing together visitors and residents alike for a weekend celebration of music, food, and the arts held in historic Old Town Bay St. Louis. The festival runs from Saturday, March 21 (10 a.m.—5 p.m.) through Sunday, March 22 (11 a.m.—4 p.m.). The Historical Society will be open with historical information and exhibits.



This architectural rendering of the Silver Slipper casino and hotel depicts the proposed additional hotel at the far left.

THE GAMING INDUSTRY IN HANCOCK COUNTY

By
James Keating, M.D.

Gambling in Mississippi has been a popular pastime in our long, rich history. Legal gambling was available in hotels like Pine Hills, the Edgewater Gulf, the Tivoli, the Buena Vista, and the White House during the mid twentieth century. Inland roadhouses provided back room gambling activity and slot machines were located in many different businesses along the coast. Road-

houses visited by white citizens were called “honky-tonks” and those visited by black citizens were called “juke joints.” However, during the 1950’s, gambling was discouraged by groups of ministers and concerned citizens that lobbied for strict enforcement of anti-gambling laws.

Nevertheless, attitudes changed in the late 1980’s. With a slumping economy in Mississippi, gambling was embraced and legislation passed to license casinos along the Mississippi River and the coastal counties. Marlin Torguson was the pre-eminent visionary of the local gaming industry and built the very successful Casino Magic in Bay St. Louis. John

THE
HISTORIAN
OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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Published monthly by the
HANCOCK COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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**LOBRANO HOUSE
HOURS**

MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)

MISSION STATEMENT

“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

Ferrucci is the General Manager of the Silver Slipper Casino at Bayou Caddy. The casinos were significant catalysts of economic development at the turn of this century. The gaming industry has become an important chapter in the economic history of Hancock County.

Marlin Torguson was born in 1945 in Glenwood, Minnesota. He went to college at St. Cloud State in MN and majored in business. In 1966, he went into business with his father who ran a restaurant/bar and resort on Lake Minnewaska called Torgy's On The Lake. He married Barbara Unger in 1968, and they had two children. Torguson is a natural born entrepreneur and extended his business interests early in life. Over the next fifteen years, Torguson developed a marine shop, sports center, garbage pickup company, motorcycle franchise, wholesale liquor and wine distribution, another restaurant/bar in Spicer, MN,

supper club in Litchfield, MN, and a package liquor store in Alexandria, MN. The original owner financed some of these new businesses. Torguson then paid off the debt over time from the profits of his growing, albeit small, local empire.

In 1984, Torguson expanded an Indian Reservation Casino and Bingo Hall, which he named Jackpot Junction. Gaming was made legal on Indian reservations in 1988. In 1989, Deadwood, South Dakota, passed a gaming law and Torguson converted a landmark building into the Gold Diggers Hotel and Casinos that opened in 1991. Meanwhile, in 1990, the Mississippi Legislature passed the Mississippi Gaming Control Act to boost the state economy. Consequently, Torguson moved to the Gulf Coast and bought what is today the Chapel Hill property from Pete Fountain, a beloved jazz clarinetist from New Orleans, for \$800,000. On June 5,



Marlin Torguson came to Bay St. Louis from Lake Minnewaska, Minnesota to build Casino Magic .



Casino Magic, which opened on September 30, 1992, was the first casino in Hancock County.

1990, Hancock County was the first county in Mississippi to pass gaming in a close contest with 4,246 votes for and 4,004 against. Torguson bankrolled and ran the referendum. An alternative, better “Bay Cove” site was found and chosen as the favorite spot for the casino which had a marina that was in Hancock County. The original land purchase for two hundred acres was for \$12.5M. Additional acreage was subsequently acquired for a total of 606 acres.

The original legislation authorized “cruise vessel gaming,” but as different casino projects anticipated the impractical obstacles to cruising on the Mississippi River or the Gulf of Mexico, revised, more friendly statutes changed the requirement to “dock-side gambling.” In any case, Torguson studied these statutes and determined that a vessel that is dockside need not contain a motor or a steam en-

gine. Indeed, his brilliant solution for a “seaworthy” vessel was a barge, not a steamboat. A barge was built at Port Bienville and towed to Bay Cove. Casino Magic opened on September 30, 1992.

Torguson operated his casino differently than most of the other casino owners. Always thinking big, he constructed the largest entertainment tent in the region to house major events next to the casino. For example, Casino Magic hosted forty-two live boxing matches that were televised on ABC Wide World of Sports, the USA network, HBO, ESPN, Telemundo, and Pay Per View Tuesday nights. In 1994, a two hundred-unit hotel was built. In 1995, Arnold Palmer completed construction of an 18-hole golf championship course.

Torguson spent \$30M to build the Casino Magic project in 1992. The venture was an

unmitigated success because his business plan was to provide exceptional customer service, rather than limit his focus only on the amount of dividends his stockholders might receive each quarter from his publically traded company, Casino Magic. He imitated the example of his favorite role model, Steve Wynn, in the way Wynn operated his Las Vegas Casino, The Mirage. Despite success in Bay St. Louis and additional casinos in Biloxi, Bossier City, La., two in Argentina, and two in Greece, in 1998 Torguson merged with Hollywood Park Race Track Inc. which soon thereafter changed its name to Pinnacle Entertainment, Inc. The property’s current owner, Penn National Gaming, operates 41 casinos. After Hurricane Katrina, the property was rebuilt and the name was changed to Hollywood Casino. Pinnacle paid \$380M for five of his casinos which included Casino Magic in that mega deal. Marlin Torguson retired in 2004 from Casino Magic and Pinnacle Entertainment and is living in Pass Christian.

A second casino called Bayou Caddy’s Jubilee Casino opened in 1994 by George Baxter. The venture did not prosper and closed in 1995 and moved to Greenville, MS.

In January of 2005, a company called Silver Slipper Casino, LLC. planned another casino for the Bayou Caddy site. It was decided to purchase the President Casino Barge that had been docked at the Broadwater Beach Resort in Biloxi. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the President before it could be

moved to Bayou Caddy. After the storm, the Mississippi Gaming Commission changed its rules to allow land-based casinos. The President Casino barge was fully insured and subsequently the project became the Silver Slipper Casino on land owned by the Cure Land Company, LLC. It opened in 2006 and was later acquired by the Full House Resorts in 2012 for \$70M. A hotel was added in 2015. The Silver Slipper is now the flagship of their fleet of five casinos.

John Ferrucci has been the General Manager of the Silver Slipper Casino since its inception. The casino has added \$30M in amenities over time. The casino has over 855 slot machines and 24 table games. The hotel has 120 units and nine penthouse suites. A second hotel is being planned to have 150 units and ten penthouse suites. Additional capital improvements scheduled as part of the Silver Slipper expansion include a convention center that can hold a meeting for up to 500 partici-



John Ferrucci is the general manager of the Silver Slipper Casino.

pants and provide banquet dining for up to 250 guests. A four hundred-car parking lot is being planned to be constructed from wetland in front of the casino (see drawing). The Silver Slipper Casino has 550 employees and engages vendors and suppliers whose businesses are located in Hancock County, creating a positive financial ripple.

The Hancock County Chamber of Commerce named Ferrucci the Citizen of the Year in 2012 because he has been such a good community activist. Ferrucci reports that there is a paucity of good hotel rooms in Hancock County for his patrons and prospective convention attendees. It is indeed fortunate that the Cure Land Company is building the Pearl Hotel in downtown Bay St. Louis that is scheduled to open for business in September of 2020. Incidentally, the Mississippi Gaming Commission has recently approved the Cure Land Company, LLC's, application for a new gaming site approximately one mile down the beach from the Silver Slipper Casino.

A typical Hancock County casino may have a thousand slot machines in its gaming parlor and twenty-five table games. A new casino might let the slot machine manufacturers such as I.G.T. (International Gaming Technology) put their slot machines in their establishments and just charge "rent." As the casino prospers, the slot machines are purchased from the manufacturers and the house keeps all the revenues. That said, slot machines are programmed to hold only 6% of the intake, accomplished with a random generator "chip." As a matter of

fact, video slot machines in most sites replaced the old mechanical "one armed bandit" a long time ago.

By comparison, table games like poker, blackjack, craps, baccarat, and roulette hold a slightly higher percentage than slots. The rest goes to the customers. Nevertheless, it is estimated that the gross revenue of the Silver Slipper Casino is about \$5M/month and that of Hollywood casino is about the same. Casinos are judged by their E.B.I.T.D.A. number also known as earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization number. The ideal is 20% or more. This number is used industry wide as an indicator of the efficiency and profitability of a casino.

The gaming industry has probably been the most important stimulant of economic development in Hancock County in the last thirty years. It provides 1000 jobs directly into the local economy. In the 1980's, Hancock County was failing as a tourist destination. Gaming has converted the economy, yet the place has not lost its unique charm. Fears that the neighborhood would deteriorate like Atlantic City did not occur. The Gulf Coast is unquestionably a "one coast" destination. Casinos pay ad valorem taxes and sizable state and local gaming taxes. The Hancock County Assessor, Jimmie Ladner, reports that in 2019 these two casinos paid to the county \$2,237,000 in real estate and property taxes. Casinos also pay municipal taxes. In addition, the casinos have been good corporate citizens. As a result, during the 1990's, the population of the Kiln and Diamondhead doubled. Twelve casinos on the Mis-

Mississippi Gulf Coast generate total revenue of \$1.2B annually.

The gaming industry has a positive economic impact on the local economy. A direct impact includes wages of casino employees, local purchases, local property taxes, and a gaming tax. Employment multiplier effects create indirect or induced jobs. Some such jobs include increased workers at other local hotels, local restaurants, retail establishments, teachers, and local law enforcement officers. Gaming promotes increased tourism and recreational spending, acting as an "export industry" attracting visitors from outside the state to spend their money locally.

The visible economic boom in our county was manifested by the addition of many businesses in the food and beverage sector and the steady increase of the real estate assessed values during the last thirty years. Current laws require any new casino venture to provide amenities such as a convention center, restaurants, and a 300-bed hotel to insure the local community shares in the prosperity created by the gaming business. Casinos contribute generously to our area non-profits and charitable organizations. Employees and administrators such as John Ferrucci are encouraged to be involved in community activities.

In summary, Hancock County was the first eligible Mississippi county whose voters approved legalized gambling in dockside casinos in 1990. Marlin Torguson was an early pioneer in the casino business and developed the first, very successful Casino Magic. John Ferrucci managed the exciting develop-

ment and expansion of the Silver Slipper Casino at Bayou Caddy. As a direct consequence of the introduction of the gaming industry into Hancock County, economic development occurred manifested by significant increased population in the bedroom communities of the Kiln and Diamondhead. Rejuvenation of the building and construction sector has been a plus locally.

Last year alone, over forty two million people visited all Mississippi casinos with the vast majority coming from outside the state. The Gulf Coast understands the adage "the tourist dollar is the purist dollar." Many residents of Hancock County and the Gulf Coast are appreciative of the loyalty and economic assistance the casinos provided following the devastation of Katrina. Casinos in our national marketplace are growing and prospering, yet competing in a complex environment.

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LIVE OAK TREE REGISTRY HONORS HISTORIC POST MASTERS

By Shawn Prychitko and
Anita Warner

Eight ancient live oak trees at the Bay St. Louis/Waveland Post Office have been added to the Live Oak Registry in Hancock County. These live oak trees were protected during the construction of the post office during the 1980's. In that time frame Mayor Victor J. Frankiewicz drew up a tree ordinance that protected all oak, magnolia, and cypress trees over twenty years of age. These eight oaks have been named and sponsored by individuals in our community. Five of these live oaks honor postmasters from the past (1819—2020) as well as the current postmaster, Judy Simms. They range in age from 107-136 years.

The Bay-Waveland Garden Club and the Hancock County Historical Society maintain the Live Oak Tree Registry. Their mission is to register live oak trees that are one hundred years old or older within Hancock County with the intention of protecting and conserving these natural resources that promote historical events, aesthetic value, and environmental significance. The project operates under the auspices of the *Société*



The photo on the left shows one of the eight live oak trees at the Bay St. Louis Post Office registered and sponsored by the Bay-Waveland Garden Club, the Hancock County Historical Society, and Bay St. Louis Post Master.

des Arbes (tree society). The registration chairs are Shawn Prychitko and Anita Warner who find, measure, and document century-old southern live oaks.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

We have prepared a series of articles about our Board of Directors and Staff. We hope you enjoy their interesting recollections of how they got here.

Virginia Olander
Director of Communications

Virginia is a native New Orleanian raised and educated in New Orleans having a 45 year career in New Orleans before retiring to Hancock County in 2015.

Before she was old enough to attend school, she loved music, cooking and art. She pushed a chair up to the stove and “helped” her mother

cook. She played the piano at age 3 by “ear” and loved to draw and paint. “My parents lovingly gave me piano lessons and art lessons. I started singing in our church choir at age 7 and playing the organ in church when I was 12. I won my first piano competition, the Bach Contest, at age 8 and my first art contest at age 9 at the New Orleans Museum of Art.”

Her parents stressed the importance of an education as well as participating in the arts and sports. “Our library at home was extensive back in the day when books were the key to information and learning. My parents stressed the four most important books in our library were on the top shelf and included the family Bible, a Webster Dictionary, Amy Vanderbilt’s Complete Book of Etiquette and Robert’s Rules of Order. We were expected to use these 4 books throughout our lives to have a

moral compass, appreciate a life of learning, know how to set a table, write a proper business letter or thank you note and to step-up as leaders and be able to speak publicly. My parents modeled these virtues for us and they were excellent teachers.”

Virginia began preparing dinners for my family at age 10 and asked for Cookbooks for presents. The first two recipes she had published were in The Mississippi Cookbook while a student at Loyola. She also had several recipes published in The Times Picayune Cookbook annual publication after winning in the categories she entered.

She received a scholarship to Loyola University College of Music where she majored in piano and minored in voice earning Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in Music. During college, she taught the piano minors and was the organist/choirmaster at a local church. She began her career as a music education specialist and choral director at the Academy of the Sacred Heart and as a church musician at



Virginia Olander
Director of Communications

Christ Church Cathedral. She also ran a private piano studio where she taught students of all levels for 30 years. She states her family is chockfull of good cooks but she became the first professional musician.

When teaching commitments allowed, she ventured away from my hometown and did post-graduate studies at The Manhattan College of Music, Westminster Choir College, Ithaca College in New York and the Jung Institute in Zurich. Virginia has lectured extensively in the value of music in contemporary society, teaching principles and ethics in music education as well as her love of Jungian Psychology. She was on the founding board of the C.G. Jung Society of New Orleans.

Throughout her music career she continued her love of cooking and attended several cooking schools given by excellent chefs.

Virginia was invited to be a part of the fund raising efforts of Loyola University, the New Orleans Symphony, Young Audiences and the 250th Anniversary of Charity Hospital. She chaired several events and with other dedicated volunteers raised money for these important institutions. The Academy of the Sacred Heart celebrated its 100th Anniversary and asked her to plan the music and direct an Alumni Choir. It was during this time her choir was invited to sing for the Pope's visit to New Orleans.

Being a church musician throughout her career, she composed "Advent Journey" that premiered at Holy Name of Jesus Church written for orchestra, choir, soloists and Cantor. Other compositions include the descant

and fanfare for Sacred Heart's celebration and the Stuart Hall for Boys school song. Virginia was the first woman conductor to conduct Handel's Messiah at Trinity Church in New Orleans.

After meeting her husband, Boa, she became involved in Music Production at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival for 15 years. Boa is in music and entertainment production and served as the Entertainment Technical Manager at Harrah's New Orleans for 15 years. For 37 years he has worked in the music production department for the New Orleans Jazz Fest & Heritage Festival and has produced music events around the country. He is an audio engineer and stage manager.

While continuing to teach full time, she was the Director of Artist Catering at Jazz Fest and the Essence Music Festival for many years. This was the best of both of her worlds – arranging requested food for artists with the wonderful chefs who offer food for the Festival. She understood the artist temperament and enjoyed matching their food requests with the chefs. She worked directly with the Food Director where we selected the foods for Jazz Fest artists and staff catering while maintaining strict food preparation safety and product consistency. She became certified in Food Safety. "This connection of food and music was an amazing experience where I learned the 'back of house' operations from excellent chefs and cooks. What a joy it was to see how the Food Vendors work their magic!"

Following Katrina, The Dean of the College of Music

and Fine Arts asked Virginia to be the head of the Music Education Department. While being responsible for the many student teachers placed in the New Orleans area, Virginia and Boa started New Orleans Luxury Rentals, a luxury corporate rental business in New Orleans renting luxury homes to actors, actresses and producers in the film industry, entertainment business, business leaders and CEO's from around the world. She taught all undergraduate and graduate Music Ed students while running our rental business for the next 10 years.

With her husband Boa, they enjoyed trips to England, Ireland, up the Atlantic Coast, the west coast and Maui. Two years ago they took their own "history" tour to Washington D.C., Mount Vernon and Morristown, NJ. while visiting family and friends on the east coast. Boa was born and raised in upstate New York and they have made many visits to the area.

Having life-long friends on the Gulf Coast, they visited the Gulf Coast for decades to get a break from their busy schedules. The decision was an easy one to make old town Bay St. Louis their home upon retirement. "We love waking up to birds singing, the beach, watching the sun rising and setting, swimming and riding our bikes. We love the peace and quiet. We cook every day and enjoy buying fresh foods at the Farmer's Market. Now that we are retired, we are able to expand our cooking adventures with more time to try new recipes. Even so, we also enjoy our favorite restaurants in Bay St. Louis and along the coast."

Virginia and Boa joined

the Hancock County Historical Society shortly after moving to Bay St. Louis to learn about their new home and make new friends. "We look forward to monthly speakers and continue to learn about Hancock County and the Gulf Coast."

Their daughter and her husband, including their busy 4 year-old grandson, live in New Orleans. Their son lives in upstate New York. Two other "adopted" daughters they helped raise along the way also live in New Orleans. Our family and friends visit us more often in the Bay than when we lived in New Orleans!

THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL EXPOSITION

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Historical and Cultural Exposition was held on February 7 and 8, 2020, at the Biloxi Visitors Center located at 1050 Beach Blvd. Hwy 90 across from the Biloxi Lighthouse. For the past several years the Hancock County Historical Society has participated in the event.

Organizations which presented exhibits during the event were Beauvoir; Biloxi Public Schools; Coastal Mississippi Mardi Gras Museum; Fleur de Lis Society; Greek, Russian, and Romanian Cultures; Gulf Coast Community Design Studio and NAACP Wade-in Remembrance Committee; Gulf Coast Historical Society; Hancock County Historical Society; Historical Society of Gulfport; Jackson County Historical and Genealogical Society; Land Trust of the Mississippi Coastal Plain, La Point-

Krebs House; Local History and Genealogy Department Biloxi Public Library; Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum; Mississippi Aviation Heritage Museum; Mississippi Coast Model Train Museum; Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area; Ocean Springs Genealogical Society; Singing River Genealogy and Local History Library; Slavo-

nian Ladies Auxiliary; USM-Gulf Park College for Women Archives; West End Hose Company #3 Fire Museum.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Historical and Cultural Exhibit is held each February at the Biloxi Visitors Center around February 13, the date d'Iberville and Bienville set foot on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in 1699.

SNAPSHOTS OF SOME OF THE EXHIBITS AT THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL EXPOSITION



Beauvoir



Biloxi Public Schools



Coastal MS Mardi Gras Museum



Local History and Genealogy Dept. Biloxi Public Library



Land Trust for the MS Coastal Plain



Maritime & Seafood Museum



La Point-Krebs House



Fleur de Lis Society



Hancock County Historical Society



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MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

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Thomas Shields (include notecards) \$100 ____

Charles Gray Society (included notecards and cookbook) \$250____

Life Time Membership (one time payment includes note cards and society cookbook) \$500____