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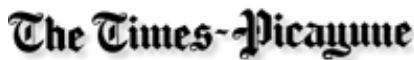
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Woodlands trail plan on track for success

Recreational path survey under way

Sunday, September 26, 2004

By Aaron Wilkinson
Contributing writer

They may be small, but the trail of tiny flags snaking through the woods through Lower Coast Algiers represents a huge step for Katie Brasted, Lower Coast resident and visionary behind the proposed Woodlands Trail and Park.

Since 1997, Brasted has been working to coordinate the construction of 19 miles of trails across Lower Coast and northern Belle Chasse for running, biking, walking, horseback riding, birding and in-line skating. The flags mark the proposed path, which is being surveyed by a Baton Rouge engineering firm for final presentation to Plaquemines Parish officials for approval.

The survey is part of an environmental assessment project supporters must complete to access a \$30,000 grant from the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program for a birding trail and \$70,000 from the state recreational trails program. The project, which will dovetail with the Great Gulf Coast Birding Trail and covers areas dotted with dome-shaped ammunition bunkers used in World War II and the Korean War, also received a \$33,000 recreational trails grant from Congress to finance the assessment.

If all goes according to plan, the trail could receive a green light within the next six to eight weeks, Brasted said.

"I think it makes sense to plan for smart growth and leave green space for our children," she said. "This is a chance to plan for infrastructure and the preservation of a unique wilderness recreation opportunity."

Parish officials have also applied to have the bunkers designated a National Historic Site. Brasted and other project designers hope to install kiosks along the trail detailing both the natural and cultural history of the area, and they have been actively seeking firsthand accounts of how the bunkers were used.

"I got calls from people all over the country who wanted to tell their story," she said. "One of the stories we heard was from a man in Plaquemines whose job was to be a sentry and ride on horseback to provide security. So (the equestrian trail) sounds like destiny, doesn't it?"

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Though the project is clearly making strides, Brasted and company stress that they have a long way to go.

Additional money is needed to continue operations and begin construction. To that end, supporters of the project have planned a fund-raiser Oct. 16 at the home of Laurent L. De La Gueronniere at 5201 Patterson Road, Algiers. The Saturday Salon on the River will begin at 2 p.m. and feature a performance by New Orleans native Katherine Celine Osborne, a critically acclaimed opera singer working out of Washington, D.C.

Tickets are \$50 per person, with the proceeds going to the Woodlands Trail and Park. For information, call Carol Cowley at 391-9930.

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