

eatplaylive kicks off today

The commissioner of tailgating shares his tales of the road



# THE NEW ORLEANS ADVOCATE

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THEN: Flood waters force thousands of LaPlace residents from their homes



Nearly one year after Hurricane Isaac's rising waters pushed into St. John the Baptist and flooded neighborhoods, few signs remain of the devastation

## FADING SCARS

NOW: Repairs are complete on about 95 percent of the 7,000 damaged homes



Advocate staff photo by JOHN MCCUSKER

Ernest Robinson looks over the renovated and nearly complete living room of his Cambridge subdivision house in LaPlace on Thursday. Floodwater filled the home during Hurricane Isaac a year ago.

BY RICHARD THOMPSON  
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The water was all the way up to the hood of their pickup when Ernest Robinson and his wife, Jeanette, decided it was time to evacuate their one-story, brick home in LaPlace's Cambridge subdivision. They left in a hurry. "The only thing we had was our medicine and the clothes we had on," Robinson, 64, recalled of that afternoon — Aug. 29, 2012, a half-day after the slow-moving Hurricane Isaac made landfall west of Grand Isle.

When the Robinsons returned days later, the water was still 3 feet deep in the home where they've lived for three decades. In a ritual familiar to many locals, Ernest Robinson spent months gutting the house, replacing everything from 4 feet on down. He put in new walls and floors; replaced the collapsed ceiling in the bathroom; installed new cabinets; purchased new furniture and appliances. The roof still needs work, he said.

"I've had to slowly rebuild this whole house, piece by piece," Robinson said, standing in his living room and thumbing through dozens of photographs that show the home in successive stages of disrepair and renewal.

### HURRICANE ISAAC

One year later



Part 1 of 2

The Robinsons are better off than many of their neighbors: They were among the roughly 30 percent of LaPlace's 30,000 or so residents who had flood insurance. The community is not in a zone where lenders require homeowners to carry flood insurance, meaning most choose to forgo it.

Even with a flood-insurance policy, Robinson said he's starting at a \$55,000 gap between what the insurance company has agreed to pay and what fixing his 3,000-square-foot house will cost him in the end. The Robinsons have spent about \$37,000 of their own money so far.

"I'm still fighting the insurance company now for a lot of things that they were supposed to pay for that they have not yet paid for," he said about his private insurer, which the Robinsons plan to drop as soon as they can.

"Even though we've been paying insurance on this house for 31 years, we weren't compensated for what we needed to put it back together, and that kind of saddens us," he said.

While Hurricane Isaac likely did more damage to St. John the Baptist Parish than any storm in history, the scars it left are

➤ See FADING, page 4A

## Corps decision expected soon on alignment of levee

BY RICHARD THOMPSON  
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A year after Hurricane Isaac's floodwaters washed over much of St. John Parish — and more than four decades after officials first began exploring building back levees there — the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finally appears ready to settle on a route for a levee to protect the River Parishes from Lake Pontchartrain's surge.

This Friday, the corps plans to disclose which of three potential alignments it will further review for the west shore Lake Pontchartrain flood protection project.

Plans to put levees between LaPlace and the lake go back more than 40 years.

➤ See LEVEE, page 4A

## Fire chief: Department lives with less Union: Safety an issue

BY ANDREW VANACORE  
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Timothy McConnell can still remember his friend Nicholas Felton boasting that he would lead the firefighters union some day. And he can still remember the competing prediction he shot back: That he, McConnell, would lead the whole department as superintendent.

They were both first-year recruits at the time, almost 30 years ago.

It took longer for McConnell to make good; he only stepped up to lead the New Orleans Fire Department last month, Irish features and a pushbroom mustache complementing what now seems like an inevitability. Felton won election as head of the New Orleans Firefighters Association, Local 632, more than a decade ago.

But if that all sounds apocryphal, a little too good to be true, it's worth pointing out that both men did agree to the account — at a time when they seem to agree on little else, at least as concerns the Fire Department.



McConnell

➤ See CHIEF, page 7A

## Introducing The New Orleans Advocate

Beginning today, we're making The New Orleans Advocate more entertaining and easier to read.

The first thing we've changed is our name as we continue to build a unique daily newspaper for New Orleans area readers. Readers have told us they want a newspaper that is as distinct as New Orleans, and we've responded, adding to our roster the city's best-known investigative reporters — including Pulitzer Prize winners — and well known names like Steven Forster, James Gill and Stephanie Grace. This week, Nell Nolan joins the team. And there is more to come.

We also have a new section, called EatPlayLive, designed to help you keep up to date on the latest trends in health, entertainment, homes and lifestyles.

On Mondays, EatPlayLive will focus on healthy living; Thursdays will feature The Advocate's popular food coverage; Fridays will bring you the hottest bands and movies; and Saturdays will be devoted to showing off the homes and gardens that make New Orleans so unique.

Despite all of these changes, some things will remain the same: EatPlayLive will include all of the features that previously appeared in our pages, from comics and puzzles to TV listings and your horoscope.

We've redesigned our section fronts to make them bolder and more colorful. And we've added new headline typefaces that should make our pages easier to read.

We hope you like these changes, and we're anxious to hear suggestions.

Reach out to us at (504) 636-7430 or at [theadvocatefeedback@theadvocate.com](mailto:theadvocatefeedback@theadvocate.com).



N.O. • Sunday



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