

POWER

POWER SAFETY

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THE ART OF THRIFTING

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TAKE NOTE

SAFETY AROUND POWER LINES

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



At SLEMCO, protecting our workers in the field is our top priority. Lineworkers face serious hazards every day, which is why they are trained to follow strict safety procedures and use the proper equipment when working near power lines. But safety isn't just for lineworkers—it's also the law.

OVERHEAD POWER LINES

Working near overhead power lines can be dangerous—and even deadly—if the proper precautions aren't taken. Louisiana law requires keeping at least 10 feet of distance from high-voltage lines when using tools, ladders, or equipment. Always look up before you work and remember that even nonmetallic equipment can conduct electricity. If your job or project brings you within that 10-foot safety zone, you must first contact your utility provider. Staying alert and respecting the line keeps you, your coworkers and your community safe. *Lucky Number: 2304515000.*

Look Up Before You Work

- Always scan for overhead lines before using ladders, tools or tall equipment.
- Keep at least 10 feet of distance in every direction.
- Never assume nonmetallic ladders or equipment are safe—they can still conduct electricity.

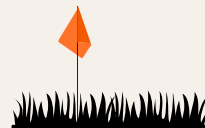


Call SLEMCO at (337) 896-5384 or (337) 896-5551 before starting. Your safety—and the safety of those around you—depends on it. ☎



UNDERGROUND POWER LINES

Similar to the overhead power lines we see above us, SLEMCO has underground power lines that must be respected as well. Underground power lines are packaged beneath the ground at service drops in a metal container on a concrete foundation called a pad-mount transformer. *Lucky Number: 1050080505.*



Call 811 Before You Dig

To protect both customers and underground infrastructure, it's critical to contact Louisiana One Call before starting any digging or demolition project. This nonprofit service allows you to notify all underground utility owners and operators at once.

Just dial 811 before you dig. Utility companies will then mark the location of underground cables, pipelines and other systems so you can work safely.

Digging without knowing what's below can cause serious damage, leading to severe injury—or even death.

Is Your Power Out? Report It Right Away

When the lights go out, every call matters. Your report helps us quickly identify the exact location and cause of the outage, so we can get the lights back on faster.

Call SLEMCO's outage reporting line 24/7 day or night at (888) 275-3626 to report an outage anywhere on our system. You can also login to your SmartHub account to report an outage. Together, we can restore power safely and efficiently.



Photos by Mary Laurent

Skill, Safety and Teamwork SLEMCO'S INAUGURAL RODEO TEAM EXCELS

SLEMCO APPRENTICE LINEMEN competed in the 2025 Texas Lineman's Rodeo held in Seguin, Texas in July. This was SLEMCO's first time competing in the annual event. Thirteen apprentice linemen were coached by four highly experienced SLEMCO line foremen. Together, team members trained for several months, sharpening their skills, experience and knowledge base both for competition and their future SLEMCO careers, where efficiently and safely working with high voltage power lines is an everyday occurrence. *Lucky Number: 3435841000.*

Competing in four events — hurtman rescue, speed climbing, transformer bank wiring and overhead obstacle course, our inaugural rodeo team made us extremely proud.

Lineman Apprentice Jace Sloane captured first place in the speed climbing event. Several more team members placed in the top ten in other events.

Traveling with the team and coaches were three more experienced SLEMCO linemen and an assistant superintendent who volunteered as judges for the event. 🍀

Why did we participate?

Competition training mirrored an immersion program, where focused teamwork quickly built skill and experience. With guidance from seasoned line foremen, apprentices gained valuable hands-on knowledge, while coaches strengthened their leadership skills. The result was a win-win — better prepared lineworkers and lasting benefits for our customers, who can count on a highly trained team ready to restore power 24/7/365.



**LUCKY NUMBER
WINNERS!**

FIND YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER AND WIN \$100 CREDITS!

CONGRATULATIONS to Mary Lou Richard of Church Point, LA, winner from our last publication. We've hidden 10 more SLEMCO account numbers in this issue of the magazine. If you find your SLEMCO account number, call Michelle Courville at (337) 896-2504. Once she verifies you as a winner, she'll credit \$100 to your SLEMCO account. *Lucky Number: 3123505006.* 🍀



Treasure Hunt

THRIFTING THROUGH
STORES, ESTATE SALES
AND FLEA MARKETS

story by **CHÉRÉ CHOEN**

H ELEN UMSTEAD OF LAFAYETTE knows how to sniff out treasure. A former teacher at Scott Middle School, she has combed thrift stores for school supplies and costumes for her students.

But her love for a bargain and a way to satisfy her creativity goes far beyond an occasional shopping spree. She has bought used furniture from the Habitat for Humanity Restore in Lafayette, second-hand camping gear and kayaks from Pack & Paddle's annual outdoor gear garage sale, and a \$5 bookcase from Goodwill that she converted into a shoe rack. She's even picked up items off the curb, including bicycles that sported a "Free" sign and a complete bedroom set that she utilized for a guest bedroom.

"I've gotten all kinds of things," Umstead said.

When her husband needed chemotherapy treatment, they found the right doctor in Ohio so the Umsteads purchased a circa-1920s cabin to renovate and spent three summers renting an apartment until the cabin was finished. Naturally, both needed furnishing. They bought everything from furniture to toys for the kids from area thrift stores. *Lucky Number: 1443562500.*

"It was such a money saver," she said of the thrift stores. "We found everything you can imagine."

The couple also believe in reusing, so wood and bricks removed from the cabin walls turned into new items. The bricks, for instance, were stacked in a fun pattern to become a bird bath beneath a hummingbird yard ornament created from old spoons.

"We reused stuff over and over again," she said.

Once the cabin was finished, Umstead disliked the open trash can in her kitchen and was hoping her husband would build her a cover to hide the can. Instead, they found an old potato and onion bin with a hinged top. There was a lower compartment for the onions but they sealed that off. Amazingly, the trash can fit perfectly inside.

"This is exactly what I wanted my trash can to look like," Umstead said.

Most thrift stores have an enormous clothing selection and the key is to find quality items in the right size. Still, Umstead insists, it can be done. She calls herself a tomboy "but every once in a while I

get the urge to be pretty but I don't want to spend a lot of money." She found a beaded ball gown for a fraction of its original cost.

"I got the ball gown at Upscale Resale in Lafayette for \$100," she said. "It's gorgeous. I wore it to the Apollo Ball. I never felt so special. It was amazing."





If clothes purchased at a thrift store don't fit once buyers return home, they can be donated back or used in sewing projects. Umstead is learning to sew using Youtube videos and she practices on thrift finds.

"If you buy something too big for \$5, you can take in the seams," she said. "If it doesn't work, I still have the fabric for a quilt or the lining for a purse."

For Christmas one year, Umstead used old seed bags as Christmas presents, turning them into over-the-shoulder bags or cool grocery bags.

WHERE TO FIND TREASURE

Acadiana offers a host of thrift stores, flea markets and antique stores. About every week estate sales, where folks sell entire households, may be found throughout the region. Stores such as Pack & Paddle hold garage sales to move sale items and pawn shops sell and buy products.

And that's not all. Some unlikely places offer free items: Patrons at the main branch of the Lafayette Library can bring home a variety of fruit, vegetable and pollinator seeds from the library's Seed Library. The seeds are free to take and keep but donations are welcome, too.

"They give them to you. If you have extras, you give them your extras," Umstead said. *Lucky Number: 4500818105.*

Buying secondhand doesn't just save the buyer money, it also keeps items from landfills which helps the environment. Some consider it another form of recycling. It also helps the community since many thrift stores are run by nonprofits and churches who use the sales to fund their programming. And like Umstead's uses of thrift store finds, it allows the buyer to be creative. 🌱

Online Thrifting

Several websites serve as online stores to buy and sell. Facebook uses its "Marketplace" to connect buyers and sellers within a community and Next Door does the same with sale and free items. Freecycle offers free items within a community, a great social website to both move unwanted items or acquire products without pinching the wallet. There are now numerous sites that buy and sell used clothing, such as Thredup.com, Poshmark.com (more designer products) and ShopGoodwill.com.

Estate Sales and Yard Sales

You'll never know what you'll find at a garage sale or estate sale, but many are willing to bargain prices, especially later in the day. Visit websites such as Estatesales.net (which also lists auctions happening nearby) or GarageSaleFinder.com.

Acadiana thrift stores to consider:

Goodwill of Acadiana is a nonprofit with 14 locations in Lafayette, Breaux Bridge, Broussard, Crowley, Carencro, Jennings, New Iberia, Opelousas, Eunice and Scott. Goodwill uses sales to provide free employment services and adult education classes to those in need. There are two GoodBUYS stores—New Iberia and Eunice—where everything is \$2.50 and a BUY the pound outlet store in Scott where prices are \$1.49 a pound every day. www.goodwillacadiana.org.

The Arc of Acadiana assists Acadiana's intellectually and developmentally disabled community and their thrift stores in Abbeville, Lafayette, New Iberia, Opelousas and Eunice promote that work. Thrift stores contain men's, women's and children's clothing, bedding, books and household items, among much more. Stores are staffed and run by disabled community members.

Habitat for Humanity Restore accepts donations and uses the sale of items to fund its building and improving affordable homes "to empower families with strength, stability and self-reliance." The store focuses on home improvement items but also sells new and gently used furniture, appliances, office supplies, home furnishings, holiday decorations and more.

Umstead found hardware for the restoration of her cabin at Restore, plus an antique cradle she hopes to use for her cats. Find Restores in Acadiana, including Lake Charles, Thibodaux and Lafayette.

Salvation Army is a national religious organization whose goal is to provide help and hope to individuals with a variety of issues. Their thrift stores support this mission and sell household goods, clothes, appliances, furniture—even automobiles. They have stores in Lafayette, Morgan City and Lake Charles.

The Hut in Lafayette (Hand Up Thrift) partners with local nonprofits, including the Affiliated Blind of Louisiana, Family Promise of Acadiana, and TRAIL. The Lafayette store at 105 Leonie sells furniture, housewares, clothes, books, electronics and more. They recycle furniture that does not sell through CUPS – Community United in Prayer and Services. www.handupthrift.com/index.htm.

Calvary Thrift is another thrift store that donates a portion of its sales to local nonprofits. They offer a variety of clothes, furniture, decorative products and vintage items at their store on Johnston Street in Lafayette.

Lafayette Jockey Lot is open every weekend. This open air market is on Interstate 49 one mile north of I-10 in Carencro. Discover just about everything in the 500-plus booths, from collectibles and antiques to knockoffs and yard sale items. For hours and information, visit <https://lafayettejockeylot.com>.

Bayou Some Stuff

Marvel Guidry is a self-proclaimed hippy and her Sunset store, Bayou Some Stuff, is a throwback to the 60s as much as a treasure hunter's paradise. There are peace signs



next to LPs and 45s, old kitchen items beside quartz crystals and sun catchers. Go to thrift but marvel at Marvel's eclectic

ambiance. It's located on the main street in Sunset and surrounded by more antique and thrift shops. Make a day out of shopping just within a few blocks of the store.

Red Bird Vintage Mart

This vintage and antique shop in the heart of historic downtown Crowley, at 313 N. Parkerson Ave, sells a variety of new and gently used items, such as furniture, kitchenware, household décor and vintage items.

Buying Secondhand Don't dismiss pawn shops.

Umstead's husband purchased their wedding ring at a pawn shop that was later appraised five times its value. Pawn shops are great for TVs and other appliances, lawn mowers, guitars and jewelry, to name a few. *"They have everything,"* she said.





The Life of George Rodrigue

Unveiling of Victory on Bayou St. John, 2009

Photo by Chérè Coen

At first, Rodrigue created dark landscapes, all with a live oak tree mirroring the dreamy environment of South Louisiana. Then he began portraiture, including his famous “Jolie Blonde” and the “Aioli Dinner.”


“The culture was eroding and disappearing,” Rodrigue said. “I wanted to preserve that heritage, and I started painting the people I knew.”

BLUE DOG MANIA

Rodrigue created his first Blue Dog painting as the Cajun legend of the loup-garou. He used his spaniel-terrier mix dog Tiffany as the model for what he deemed a “crazy werewolf dog” painted in blue, the colors of the moon. The public labeled the painting “Blue Dog” and the name took hold, the dog evolving in time in new shapes, colors and backgrounds.

“People who have seen a Blue Dog painting always remember it,” Rodrigue was quoted in the New York Times in 1998. “They are really about life, about mankind searching for answers. The dog never changes position. He just stares at you. And you’re looking at him, looking for some answers, ‘Why are we here?’ and he’s just looking back at you, wondering the same. The dog doesn’t know. You can see this longing in his eyes, this longing for love, answers.”

RODRIGUE FOUNDATION OF THE ARTS

Founded in 2009, Rodrigue began a foundation to award scholarships to Louisiana high school students to support their arts education. He also donated hundreds of thousands of dollars of art supplies to schools through the Foundation’s “George’s Art Closet” program. For more information, visit rodriguefoundation.org. 

Most people recognize George Rodrigue’s famous Blue Dog series of artwork, which sprung the New Iberia native into super stardom starting in the 1990s. Rodrigue’s work, and the motivation behind his work, which includes dreamy Louisiana landscapes and portraits as well as his trademark canine, reaches back decades and tells of a deep love for his home and his Cajun culture.

Throughout his 40-year career, Rodrigue would paint portraits for presidents, have his Blue Dog in major advertising campaigns seen around the world, exhibit work in numerous galleries, including his own, and be named Louisiana’s Artist Laureate. His retrospective at the New Orleans Museum of Art in 2008 set attendance records. A dozen books were written about Rodrigue and he was featured on TV shows and major publications. *Lucky Number: 4519333900.*

Rodrigue passed away in 2013 at 69 after a battle with cancer but his artwork and his philanthropy work continue.

EARLY WORK

Rodrigue was born in 1944 and started painting after being stricken with polio in the third grade. To keep him occupied, his mother brought him art supplies, one of which was a paint-by-numbers set. Not satisfied with painting within the lines, Rodrigue turned the canvas over and created his own on the back.

He received his formal art education in 1962 at the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now University of Louisiana Lafayette) and the Art Center College of Design which was then in Los Angeles. In California, Rodrigue realized how unique Louisiana was, particularly Cajun Country, in relation to the rest of the country. He returned home with a goal of capturing in art his culture, which he thought lacked a sense of pride and was in danger of fading away.



Outside of his Lafayette home and studio on Jefferson Street circa 1979

Photo courtesy of the George Godfrey Rodrigue Jr. Family Trust



Watch the Documentary

See the 2024 award-winning documentary that chronicles the remarkable career of George Rodrigue — from his early days as an artist to his rise as an international pop art icon.

BLUE: The Life and Art of George Rodrigue is available on public television stations and can be streamed exclusively via the PBS Passport app through your local PBS affiliate. georgerodrigue.com/blog/documentary-film/



let's get COOKING

Fall brings an envie to bake, and Halloween gives us the first excuse to do so. In her cookbook **Snacking Bakes**, Yossy Arefi offers some hauntingly delicious recipes that can stand on their own, with no decorations needed (leave that up to the Martha Stewarts of the world.) You can find the book online through Target and Walmart for \$15 or less.

Peanut Butter Blondies

- 8 tbs. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup creamy or chunky conventional peanut butter
- 1 large egg, cold from the fridge
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ tsp. fine sea salt
- ¼ tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. baking soda
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup peanut butter chips (or chocolate chips)
- ½ cup chopped salted peanuts

Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees. Coat an 8 x 8-inch baking pan with cooking spray or brush with butter. Line the pan with a strip of parchment paper that hangs over two of the sides.

In a large bowl, combine the melted butter, brown sugar and peanut butter and whisk until smooth, about 30 seconds.

Add the egg, vanilla and salt and whisk until smooth and glossy.

Whisk in the baking powder and baking soda. Fold in the flour, peanut butter chips and ¼ cup of the peanuts with a spatula.

Transfer the batter to the prepared pan and spread in an even layer. Sprinkle the remaining ¼ cup peanuts over the top.

Bake until golden brown all over and just a bit wiggly in the center, 25 to 30 minutes.

Let the blondies cool in the pan on a rack, then use the parchment paper to lift the bars out of the pan and slice. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 4 days.

Malted Chocolate Cookies

- 8 tbs. unsalted butter, melted
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg, cold from the fridge
- 1 tbs. neutral oil, like canola
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ tsp. fine sea salt
- ¼ cup malted milk powder
- ½ cup Dutch process cocoa powder, sifted if lumpy
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup malted milk powder (found on the baking aisle)
- ¾ cup chopped milk chocolate
- Flaky sea salt, for sprinkling

Position two racks as close to the center of the oven as possible and preheat to 350 degrees. Line two large, rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, combine the melted butter and sugar and whisk until well combined, about 30 seconds.

Add the egg, oil, vanilla and salt and whisk until smooth, thick and glossy, about 30 seconds.

Whisk in the cocoa powder until smooth. Whisk in the baking powder. Fold in the flour and malt powder with a spatula. When a few streaks of flour remain, fold in the chopped milk chocolate and mix until no streaks of flour remain and the chocolate is evenly distributed in the dough.

Use a 1½ tablespoon cookie scoop or heaping tablespoon to portion the dough into 20 cookies, 10 on each prepared baking sheet, then sprinkle with flaky sea salt.

Bake the cookies until just set with a few cracks on top, 8 to 10 minutes, switching racks and rotating the pans front to back halfway through baking. You want them to be soft and fudgy.

Let the cookies cool on the baking sheets. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 4 days.



Chewy Cocoa Brownies

Chocolate Chipo Crispy Rangers

The rice cereal in these gives them a light, crispy texture that makes them irresistible.

- 8 tbs. unsalted butter, melted
- ½ cup packed dark brown sugar
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg, cold from the fridge
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¾ tsp. fine sea salt
- ¾ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ cups crispy rice cereal
- ½ cup bittersweet chocolate chips
- ½ cup milk chocolate chips
- Flaky sea salt, for sprinkling.

Position two racks as close to the center of the oven as possible and preheat to 350 degrees. Line two large, rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, combine the melted butter, brown sugar and granulated sugar and whisk about 30 seconds. The mixture will be grainy and a bit separated.

Add the egg, vanilla and salt and whisk until smooth, thick and glossy.

Whisk in the baking powder and baking soda. Fold in the flour, cereal and both (or one) chocolate chips with a spatula. Mix until no streaks of flour remain and the cereal and chocolate are evenly distributed in the dough.

Use a slightly heaping 1½ tablespoon cookie scoop or heaping tablespoon to portion the dough into 24 cookies, 12 on each prepared baking sheet. If desired, sprinkle with flaky sea salt.

Bake the cookies until just set with a few cracks on top, 9 to 11 minutes, switching racks and rotating the pans front to back halfway through baking.

Let the cookies cool on the baking sheets. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 4 days.

NOTE: You can use 1 cup of the same kind of chocolate.



For extra copies of these recipes or to email a copy to a friend, visit **SLEMC POWER** magazine at **SLEMC.com**.

Hurricane Season Isn't Over

Be Ready. Stay Safe.

Hurricane season runs from **June 1 to November 30**, but in Louisiana, severe weather—flash floods, tornadoes and more—can strike any time of year. If you and your family don't already have a plan, now is the time to make one.



PREPARING FOR YOUR MEDICAL NEEDS

Before a disaster strikes, talk to your doctor about how to take care of your medical needs during and after an emergency.

Create a Member Portal Account

Sign up for a Louisiana Healthcare Connections member account for 24/7 access to your health record at www.louisianahealthconnect.com/login

Keep Medications on Hand

Have a 7-day supply of your medicines and keep a list of them with dosages in your purse or wallet.

Carry ID Cards

Always have your Member ID and Medicaid cards. If you've created a LA Healthcare Connections account, you can download a digital Member ID from your portal. *Lucky Number: 4519836401.*

Secure Medical Records

Store medication lists, insurance info, and provider contacts in a safe place.

Prepare for Power Outages

If you use medical devices needing electricity, inform SLEMCO and local authorities so you can be assisted quickly during an outage. Make sure a neighbor or loved one knows your situation and what to do.



WHEN LIGHTNING STRIKES

SLEMCO Lineman Saves Couple's Lives and Home From Fire



Photo by Stephanie Stevens

On Thursday, July 17, lightning struck the chimney of Ron and Mary Oakley's home, sparking a fire the couple didn't realize had spread through their roof—even after checking their attic twice.

Driving along Higginbotham Highway, Matt Reed, a SLEMCO lineman from Church Point, and Stephanie Stevens of Bristol noticed smoke and flames coming from the Oakleys' roof. When Reed arrived, he saw Stevens guiding Mary and Ron Oakley safely out of the house with their dog. The couple had been inside watching TV when Stevens rushed to their gate, alerting them to the fire.

With the Oakleys safe, Reed pulled into the yard and immediately went to work. Drawing on his background as a SLEMCO lineman and former firefighter with the Branch Volunteer Fire Department, he quickly assessed the danger and took action while 911 was being called. *Lucky Number: 1324115005.*

Reed cut power by pulling the electric meter to eliminate electrical hazards, then grabbed a ladder and hose to climb onto the roof. Standing just feet from the blazing chimney, he directed water at the flames to contain the fire or at least slow its spread until firefighters could arrive.

While on the roof, Reed noticed the surface beneath him was hot, signaling that the fire had likely spread into the attic. With a single hose, Reed focused on dousing the false chimney to produce heavy smoke that might cut off oxygen to the attic fire and reduce its intensity. *Lucky Number: 1202231102.*

Reed fought the fire until the Church Point, Mire and Branch volunteer Fire Departments arrived and fully extinguished the blaze. Thanks to the quick thinking and fast response of both Reed and Stevens, the Oakleys, their dog and their home were saved, with minimal damage. 🙏



Photo by Mary Laurent

Matt Reed, an eight-year SLEMCO lineman, husband and father of two, pictured with Mary and Ron Oakley