

POWER

NATURE'S FINEST FEATHERS

ANNUAL
MEETING
WRAP UP &
WINNERS

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Cover photo by Neil Hayes, avid avian fan, photographer and SLEMCO customer.



TAKE NOTE

SLEMCO'S 89TH ANNUAL MEETING

A CELEBRATION OF COMMUNITY AND COMMITMENT



Photos by Kimberly Ann Photography

THE 2026 SLEMCO ANNUAL MEETING held at Lafayette's Cajundome was a resounding success, drawing thousands of members eager to participate in a day filled with excitement, valuable prizes and community spirit. *Lucky Number: 4502833000.*

GRAND PRIZE WINNERS ANNOUNCED

Among the highlights of the day was the announcement of the Grand Prize winners. Randall Dore of Kaplan was the star as he claimed the top prize of \$30,000 in cash. "I've been coming to the meeting for the last 12 years and have never won a thing," exclaimed Dore, expressing his disbelief and joy. "I have no idea what I'll spend the money on. I'm blown away—I came expecting not to win anything."



Other lucky winners included Marcus Richard from Church Point, who took home \$5,000, while James Matte, also from Church Point, walked away with \$2,500. Additionally, the early bird prize of a \$3,000 SLEMCO bill credit was awarded to Basile residents Matthew and Jennifer Courville, who were thrilled with their unexpected good fortune.

INVESTING IN FUTURE GENERATIONS

In line with SLEMCO's dedication to the community, \$40,000 in college scholarships were awarded to 20 deserving students set to further their education in college or trade schools this fall. This initiative underscores SLEMCO's commitment to fostering the next generation of leaders and skilled professionals, ensuring that education remains a priority in our community.

LEADERSHIP UPDATES AND FUTURE GOALS SLEMCO Board President David Simon of Gueydan and Chief Executive Officer Katherine Domingue of Lafayette took the stage to provide valuable updates on the cooperative's major projects and outline the future goals and objectives of the organization.





As SLEMCO celebrates its 89th year in service, both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to prioritizing service reliability, maintaining rate stability and fostering transparent communication with SLEMCO customers. Board Members Don Resweber of St. Martin Parish, David Simon of Vermilion Parish and Gary Soileau of St. Landry Parish were all re-elected to the board unopposed, ensuring continuity in leadership and vision for the cooperative. *Lucky Number: 1034064500.*



LIFE-SAVING BLOOD DRIVE COLLABORATION Adding to the spirit of giving back, Vitalant Blood Services hosted their annual blood drive at the meeting. Members participated, resulting in several hundred units of blood products collected. The donations are vital in supporting local hospitals and saving lives throughout Acadiana.

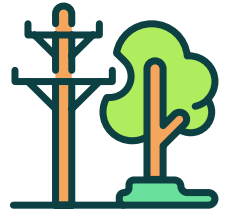
A STRONG COMMITMENT TO SERVICE As SLEMCO serves over 120,000 residents and businesses across the parishes of Acadia, Avoyelles, Cameron, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin and Vermilion, the cooperative remains resolute in its mission to provide reliable electricity, uphold community values and engage with its members. The enthusiasm and gratitude displayed during the 2026 Annual Meeting serve as a testament to the thriving partnership between SLEMCO and its dedicated members. As we look forward to another year, SLEMCO is excited to continue strengthening our relationships within our communities while providing the exceptional service our members deserve. Thank you for being an integral part of the SLEMCO family! *Lucky Number: 1311349500.* 🍀



Rooted in Safety

How Tree Placement Can Protect Our Power Grid and more

No one wants to lose power after a storm, but trees planted too close to power lines can cause significant issues during severe weather events like hurricanes.



BEFORE YOU PLANT:

Proper planning and tree placement can help prevent these problems and ensure reliable electrical service. Be aware of the height and spread of your tree—only plant trees under 25 feet tall near power lines. Also, avoid planting near electric transformers, allowing at least 8 feet in front and 2 feet around the sides and back.

MANAGING EXISTING TREES:

If you have existing trees near power lines, it's crucial to manage their growth. Trees grown in open areas may develop wide branches or double trunks, making them prone to damage. To maintain tree health, trim branches lightly right after planting and continue this 'training' throughout the tree's life. This proactive approach will help prevent structural issues as the tree matures.

BENEFITS OF TREES: Planting trees directly fights climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Strategically planting them around properties provides natural shade, lowering local temperatures and cutting air conditioning costs. Additionally, their roots reduce stormwater runoff and soil erosion. *Lucky Number: 3045330207.*

To get started on planting at your home, business or in your neighborhood, contact **TreesAcadiana** (TreesAcadiana.org), a local non-profit organization dedicated to planting and conserving trees, urban and community forests in and around Acadiana or find planting guides and initiatives through the **Arbor Day Foundation** (arborday.org/value).

Thank you to all our members for attending, and congratulations to our winners!

Mark your calendar for next year's meeting on Saturday, June 12, 2027.



LUCKY NUMBER WINNERS!

FIND YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER AND WIN \$100 CREDITS!

WE'VE HIDDEN 10 SLEMCO ACCOUNT NUMBERS IN THIS ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE. Look to see if you find your SLEMCO account number. If you do, call Michelle Courville at (337) 896-2504. Once she verifies you as a winner, she'll credit \$100 to your SLEMCO account. *Lucky Number: 2319663900.* 🍀

A photograph of three owls in a natural setting. A large, dark brown owl with yellow eyes is perched on a branch in the center. To its right, a lighter-colored owl with yellow eyes is perched on a branch. To the left, a small, fluffy owl chick is visible. The background consists of a wooden fence and some foliage.

story by DIXIE POCHE

FROM RESCUE TO RELEASE

Letitia Labbie

Most of us lack firsthand knowledge of how to help injured wildlife. Fortunately, there are environmental stewards in Louisiana, such as Letitia Labbie of Acadiana Wildlife and Julie Rabalais of For Birds of Acadiana, who are dedicated to helping injured wildlife. Certification through the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries requires intense training and specialized care. Establishing a rehabilitation center requires strict compliance with regulations for animal care and release.

Rescued animals undergo physical healing and must relearn survival skills like hunting, perching and flying. Certified wildlife rehabilitators minimize human contact to prevent imprinting, which can impede birds' ability to interact with their species and limits their chances of surviving in the wild.

Letitia Labbie established **Acadiana Wildlife** in 1998 on her five-acre farm in Youngsville. Growing up in Georgia, she developed an early love for rescuing rabbits and squirrels while exploring neighboring woods. Today, she cares for 500 patients annually; a number that increases as storms or hurricanes sweep through the region. She primarily works with raptors, or birds of prey, such as great horned owls, turkey vultures, Mississippi kites and bald eagles. These powerful birds glide, flap, soar and hover as they hunt, protect their territory and breed. Most people are awed by raptors, particularly focusing on their sharp talons, wide wingspans, hooked beaks and haunting eyes. However, Letitia approaches them with calmness and wears protective gear, aware that the animal may be nervous and disoriented by their new environment. To assist in their recovery, raptors are provided with specialized flight cages to help the birds regain their flight capabilities before being released back into the wild.

Letitia emphasizes that her daily life as a wildlife rehabilitator is far removed from the fairytale world of Snow White. Unlike the classic

What draws us to birds, the ethereal feathered friends who move effortlessly between earth and sky? Birdwatchers are captivated by the blue heron's graceful beauty, the warbler's enchanting songs and the crow's aptitude in solving puzzles.

While the diversity of birds varies in size, color and behavior, the National Audubon Society recognizes that birds support healthy ecosystems. They help to pollinate flowers, fertilize soil with nutrient-rich droppings, control pests by eating insects and rodents, and clean up roadkill and natural carcasses, thus reducing the spread of disease. *Lucky Number: 3035180203.*

Injured wildlife, especially birds, often appear in our community. Storms may send baby birds tumbling from their nests, and birds of prey are sometimes struck by cars. Domestic pets, especially free-roaming cats, are a major threat to wild birds. These incidents highlight the vulnerability of birds due to both natural and man-made hazards.

storybook portrayal, there is no leisurely wandering through forest paths while birds joyfully sing. Instead, her work is unpredictable and fast-paced as calls for help with injured wildlife come in at all hours. *Lucky Number: 2313505800.*

Sometimes even after being released into the wilderness, animals circle back to Letitia's farm, hoping to get a free meal. One memorable example is Toot-Toot, a red-shouldered male hawk, recognizable for his distinctive loud calls and three-foot wingspan. After being released, Toot-Toot returned to the farm seeking not just food but also companionship. The male hawk demonstrated the proper rituals to courting for a mate. He built a nest in a nearby tree and offered her gifts such as live snakes. Over time, the couple established their homestead and raised their family of four.

As a lifelong bird-enthusiast, Julie Rabalais has always had a deep appreciation for nature, which began in her Michigan childhood as she spent time observing



Julie Rabalais



Julie Rabalais

pigeons. At her rehabilitation center in Lafayette, she has created a welcoming space for doves and pigeons, known as a "pigeoneer," where these birds can freely wander. In 2020, she founded

For the Birds of Acadiana and became licensed as an avian rehabilitator with a focus on songbirds, shorebirds and waterfowl. *Lucky Number: 3059327004.*

Her center is filled with an astonishing variety of patients; last year she treated more than 1,000 birds. Recently she has cared for ducklings—including mallards and Muscovy ducks and has housed everything from tiny hummingbirds to large pelicans, blue-winged teals, robins, Canada geese, cardinals, killdeer, and blue jays. And she also provides a safe haven to another impressive, winged animal—a bat.

She collaborates with creatures so small they can fit in the palm of her hand, often feeding them every 15–30 minutes with an eye dropper. Her spring and summer seasons are a blur of chirps amid fluttering wings. Nestlings arrive featherless and hungry. Migratory shorebirds come in exhausted and injured; their long journeys interrupted by storms, habitat loss or collisions.

Behind the scenes, Julie meticulously documents every animal in her care through a detailed database noting where each bird was found, the nature of its injuries, treatment plans, progress during recovery and a release back to nature. In temporary care, birds can become stressed, so a mirror is sometimes placed as a stand-in companion. Even the simple act of housing similar species—such as mockingbirds and hummingbirds—together can bring a sense of calm.

These 501(c) 3 non-profit organizations do not receive state nor federal funding and depend heavily on donations to purchase supplies and food. Although primarily working with birds, Letitia and Julie support a wide range of wildlife. Check out their social media posts for a "birds-eye view" on nature offering educational tips such as how to create a bird-friendly habitat in your backyard. Donations or calls for assistance when encountering injured wildlife may be made directly through their websites. 📧

Letitia Labbie – (337) 288-5146
www.acadianawildlife.org

Julie Rabalais – (337) 501-4523
www.forthebirdsofacadiana.com

HUMMINGBIRD

Photos by Neil Hayes



COMMON YELLOWTHROAT



Summer Guests

Look up at the sky during an avian migration and see flocks of birds instinctively moving in precise formations. Consider their remarkable resilience as they stay on course as they follow routes called migratory flyways. This global phenomenon primarily occurs during the spring (mid-March to mid-June) and autumn (mid-September to mid-October). In 2026, peak movement across the United States reached an estimated 400-500 million birds in a single night.

Louisiana's prime location makes it an important crossroad of these "highways in the sky." Drawn by the state's remarkable diversity of landscapes—from freshwater marshes and bottomland forests to coastal cheniers—these travelers find critical rest stops for rest, nesting and raising their young along their journey. Our rich natural habitats



SUMMER TANAGER

provide abundant opportunities for bird enthusiasts to experience a vibrant avian life up close.

Each spring, bird enthusiasts unite for World Migratory Bird Day. Louisiana plays a big role as more than 2.5 million birds take flight over us daily.

A key focus of this bird

awareness campaign is the Lights Out Initiative. Residents and businesses are encouraged to turn off non-essential lighting, from 11 pm to 6 am during migration seasons. Many bird species migrate under the cover of night, relying on the natural illumination of the moon and stars to guide their journey. By reducing artificial light at night, we can provide a safer path for migrating birds, supporting their instinctive navigation and ensuring successful travel along their routes with less likelihood of bird predators.

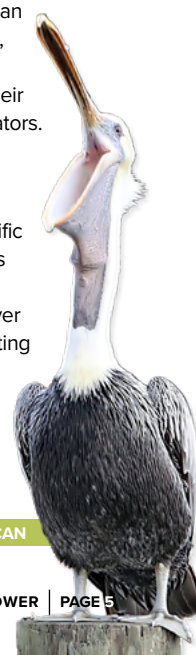
FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Birdcast (www.Birdcast.org) is a scientific forecasting tool that tracks and predicts bird migration across North America and has been compiling the data for over 25 years. User friendly, it offers fascinating data documenting the direction, speed and number of birds in flight.

Louisiana birding
https://www.birdinglouisiana.com/

Louisianawildlifefederation
www.lawildlifefed.org

PELICAN





Let's Flock to Gueydan

WE'RE STILL A FEW MONTHS OUT before the opening of duck season in Gueydan, but when August comes around, duck lovers and festivalgoers alike flock to the Duck Capital of America® for the annual Gueydan Duck Festival.

This year's festival, scheduled for Aug. 27 through 30, is special in that it marks the event's 50th anniversary, celebrating a sport that dates back to the late 1800s in Gueydan.

The town has long benefited from its agriculture and abundant wetlands, bringing a unique migration pattern of ducks directly through the region. As word-of-mouth brought growing popularity as a hunting destination, a local women's club, Les Dames de Gueydan, trademarked Gueydan as the Duck Capital of America in 1977. That prompted the Gueydan Jaycees and a group of citizens to form the Gueydan Duck Festival Association.

"We keep the events true to duck and goose hunting," says Todd Scott, third-time Duck Festival president, when speaking about the various activities that begin as soon as Aug. 1 with a wine and cheese social. "We have to start before the actual festival, because we have a limited number of volunteers," he explains.

Leading up to the festival, there is a pageant, the state duck-and goose-calling contest and dog trials, both of which encourage young participants to continue

traditions tied to duck hunting. (The youngest winner of the calling contest was eight, and there have been nine- to 12-year-olds in the dog trials.)

Other events include a carnival, skeet shooting, a parade, this year featuring grand marshals the Cajun Mamas, and a cooking contest.

Many come for the food, which highlights specialties you won't find elsewhere: duck quesadillas, duck jambalaya, duck poppers, duck boudin and the popular "quack balls," essentially a boudin ball made with duck meat.

The entertainment is another big draw says Scott, with this year's music lineup featuring Louisiana legend Wayne Toups and headliner, country star Tracy Byrd, along with other favorites. *Lucky Number: 1413600501.*

The duck festival is a massive cultural celebration that brings together families as well as sixth-generation duck hunters from around Acadiana. It has grown from a few blocked-off streets to an area encompassing 20 acres and a pavilion. "It's one of the only festivals that owns its fairground," Scott points out. 🍷



Featured Events

August 1
Wine & Cheese Social

August 9
Junior Pageant

August 15
Duck Calling Contest

August 22
Dog Trials

August 29
Parade & Queen's Pageant

August 28-29
Skeet Shoot

August 30
Cooking Contest

Entertainment lineup
featuring *Wayne Toups, Richard LeBouf & Two Step, Tracy Byrd, Gyth Rigdon and more*

Admission is free on Thursday and Sunday for everyone and on Friday and Saturday, there is no charge for children 12 and under. For more information, check DuckFestival.org.



let's get COOKING

Plump eggplant, snappy green beans, sweet corn, meaty tomatoes, nutty squash,

delicious peaches and figs, fresh shrimp and crabs; these are the flavors of summer now at their peak. We've done them justice with recipes from a little-known cookbook of the past: the Harris County Heritage Society's anniversary book *Repast*, which can still be gotten on eBay.

Louisiana Eggplant Casserole

Serves 6-8

- 2 tbs. margarine
- ¼ cup onions, chopped
- 2 large fresh tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 medium or 1 large eggplant, peeled and chopped
- ¼ cup water
- 1 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- 1 tbs. sugar
- 2½ cups crumbled cornbread or bread crumbs
- 2 eggs
- ¼ to ½ tsp. Tabasco sauce

Melt margarine, add onions and sauté until limp. Add tomatoes, eggplant, water, salt and pepper. Cook until eggplant is very tender. Remove from heat and mash into a smooth pulp. Add sugar, crumbled cornbread, eggs and Tabasco sauce. (Mixture should resemble a thick cake batter.) Pour into greased casserole and bake 35-45 minutes until firm or lightly browned.

Corn Monterey

Serves 6

- (1) 16-oz. can yellow cream-style corn
- 1 cup biscuit mix
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 tbs. vegetable oil
- ½ cup milk
- (1) 4oz. can chopped green chilies
- 6 ozs. Monterey Jack cheese, sliced

Combine corn, biscuit mix, egg, vegetable oil and milk; mix well. Spread half of mixture in a greased 8 x 8 x 2" pan. Cover with green chilies and cheese. Spread remaining batter over top. Bake at 400 degrees for 30 minutes, or until golden.

Squash Souffle

Serves 4

- 8 small fresh summer squash
- ½ cup onion, chopped
- (1) 10 ¾-oz. can cream of mushroom soup
- 2 eggs, separated
- Seasoning to taste

Season squash and cook with onion until tender. Drain well. Mix squash, soup and two egg yolks. Beat egg whites until stiff and fold in. Season to taste and pour into casserole dish placed in large pan of water. Bake at 350 degrees until well puffed and nicely brown, about 1 hour.

Chesapeake Bay Crab Pie

Serves 6-8

- 1 cup onion, cut into rings
- ½ cup celery, chopped
- 2 tbs. butter
- 1 cup crabmeat*
- 1½ cups cheese, shredded (Swiss or sharp Cheddar)
- (1) 9-in. pastry shell, unbaked
- 3 eggs
- ¾ cup half-and-half cream
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. pepper

Tomatoes or parsley for garnish

Sauté onion and celery in butter until onion is soft and golden. Spoon alternate layers of crab, cheese and onions-celery mixtures in pie shell. Combine eggs, cream, salt and pepper in bowl. Beat and pour over mixture in pie shell. Bake at 400 degrees until firm (30-40 minutes.) When point of a knife, inserted in center, comes out clean, filling is set. Cool slightly before cutting. Garnish with tomato wedges or parsley, if desired.

*The crabmeat can be substituted with salmon or shrimp.

Shrimp Newberg

Serves 4

- 1 lb. shrimp, cleaned and deveined
- ¼ cup margarine
- 3 green onions, chopped fine
- 2 tbs. flour
- 1 tbs. paprika
- ¼ cup sherry, dry
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup cream

- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
- ½ cup Cheddar cheese, grated

Sauté shrimp in melted margarine until pink, then add onion. Add flour and paprika, stirring and blending well. Add sherry; simmer and stir for 1 minute. Add milk, cream, salt, cayenne pepper and simmer 10 minutes until creamy consistency. Add cheese and stir until melted. Serve over split and toasted French bread or buns or rice.

Fig Cake

Serves 10

- 2 ½ cups sugar
- ¾ cup shortening (or softened butter)
- 4 eggs, separated
- 1 cup fig preserves
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup pecans (optional)
- 3½ cups flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- ½ tsp. nutmeg
- ½ tsp. ground cloves
- ½ tsp. allspice
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 tsp. vanilla



Cream sugar and shortening; add egg yolks. Add preserves, raisins and pecans to egg mixture. Mix flour, soda and spices together. Add the flour mixture alternately with buttermilk. Add vanilla. Gently fold in beaten egg whites. Bake in greased and floured tube pan at 350 degrees for 1 to 1½ hours.

Fresh Peach Ice Cream (no churn)

Serves 6-8

- 6 ripe peaches, peeled and pitted (about 4 cups, sliced)
- 2-3 tbs. lemon juice
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ pint whipping cream
- 1 pint half and half

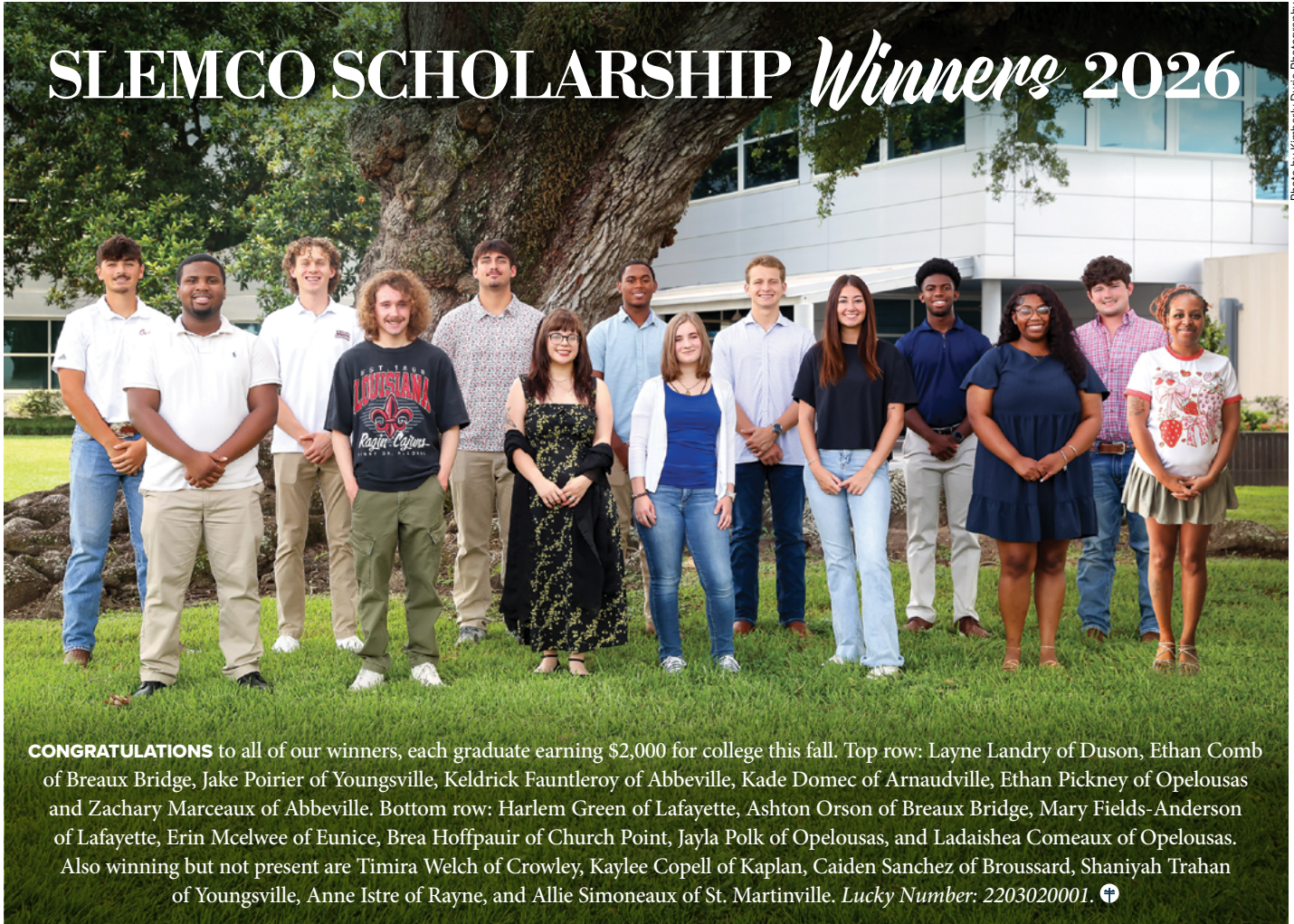
Sieve or buzz peaches in blender or processor. Add lemon juice, sugar and creams. Freeze in refrigerator trays until partially frozen. Then beat in mixer until smooth. Return to the freezer in covered container. Makes 1 quart.



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

SLEMCO SCHOLARSHIP *Winners* 2026

Photo by Kimberly Duno Photography



CONGRATULATIONS to all of our winners, each graduate earning \$2,000 for college this fall. Top row: Layne Landry of Duson, Ethan Comb of Breaux Bridge, Jake Poirier of Youngsville, Keldrick Fauntleroy of Abbeville, Kade Domec of Arnaudville, Ethan Pickney of Opelousas and Zachary Marceaux of Abbeville. Bottom row: Harlem Green of Lafayette, Ashton Orson of Breaux Bridge, Mary Fields-Anderson of Lafayette, Erin McElwee of Eunice, Brea Hoffpauir of Church Point, Jayla Polk of Opelousas, and Ladaishea Comeaux of Opelousas. Also winning but not present are Timira Welch of Crowley, Kaylee Copell of Kaplan, Caiden Sanchez of Broussard, Shaniyah Trahan of Youngsville, Anne Istre of Rayne, and Allie Simoneaux of St. Martinville. *Lucky Number: 2203020001.* 🍀

Planning a digging project? Don't take chances—know what's below!



When you submit a locate request to Louisiana 811, they utilize an advanced computerized mapping system to inform utility members whose infrastructure may be impacted by your excavation or demolition project. Individual utility companies will mark their cables, pipelines, and other facilities to help you avoid them. It is your responsibility to steer clear of these marked areas during your digging, as any necessary repairs or maintenance will also fall upon you.

Particular care is required if your gas, electric, or water meters are not located directly on your property. Many residential and commercial properties have utility meters positioned some distance away. In such cases, you are accountable for the lines that connect these meters to your building. Even if utility companies have marked their lines near your excavation site, digging in unmarked areas can still pose risks or lead to disruptions in service. 🍀

Contact Louisiana 811 before you dig to protect yourself, your property, and your community.
Call or Click Before You Dig. It's Free, and It's the Law.
811, (800) 272-3020 or www.louisiana811.com

