

POWER

**ANNUAL MEETING
JUNE 13**

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HENRI BENDEL

An Original Influencer

The Official Publication of the Southwest Louisiana Electric Membership Corporation

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COVER: Photo by Summer Greer, courtesy of the Lafayette Museum. Portrait of Henri Bendel, by an unnamed artist, hangs in the Lafayette Museum.



TAKE NOTE

89TH ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, June 13, 2026



Mark your calendars for **SLEMCO's 89th Annual Membership Meeting on Saturday, June 13**, at the Cajundome in Lafayette. Get ready for a thrilling day, as doors will open at 6 AM!

Come and enjoy complimentary hot Community Coffee while catching up with friends and neighbors, and kids engage in hands-on activities that make learning fun and memorable. Additional refreshments will be available for purchase at the Cajundome, but please note that outside food and drink are not permitted due to venue policy. *Lucky Number: 4501620303.*

Get ready to dance as music kicks off at 6:30 a.m. Don't forget your dancing shoes! Vitalant will be conducting their annual blood



drive at our meeting, and your generous contributions continue to be vital given the ongoing need for blood in our communities.

Be there for your chance to win amazing prizes! Prize drawings will kick off at 8 a.m. and will run until our business meeting starts at 10 a.m. During the meeting, you'll receive updates from our company officers and legal counsel about SLEMCO operations, followed by the chance to win a share of \$40,000 in college scholarships, with \$2,000 going to each of 20 lucky students. *Lucky Number: 4500686503.*

To wrap up the event, we will also hold the grand prize drawings. Be sure to check the next issue for the list of grand prizes! We can't wait to celebrate with you! 🎉

Commercial Customers Can Enter Prize and Scholarship Drawings Too

SLEMCO INVITES its commercial customers to take part in exciting prize drawings by submitting a letter to SLEMCO's main office by June 13. This letter should specify the name of the authorized representative for the company. On the day of the meeting, this representative must present an ID to receive a card for the prize drawing. *Lucky Number: 4517792900.*

Proof of business ownership is required when a business sponsors a scholarship applicant.

Additionally, owners of commercial establishments who are SLEMCO customers can sponsor their children, themselves or their spouses for the scholarship drawing, provided they own more than 50% of the business, corporation or partnership. Don't miss this opportunity to participate! 🍀

SLEMCO 2026 NOMINATING COMMITTEE

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VERMILION PARISH

Keith Hensgens
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The committee will meet April 7, 2026, at 9:30 a.m. at the SLEMCO office, 2727 SE Evangeline Thruway, Lafayette, LA 70508.

(s) John B. Meaux, Board Secretary

Power Pole Accident Safety

What to Do If You Crash Into an Electric Pole

CRASHING INTO A POWER POLE is a life-threatening emergency. If this happens, part of the power line may fall onto your car or truck. First and foremost, always assume the line and therefore your car is energized and extremely dangerous. Call 911 right away and stay inside the vehicle unless you see fire or smoke.

If you must leave the vehicle, make sure you don't touch the ground and the car at the same time. If the line is energized, your body will have given a path to ground and you could be electrocuted. To safety exit the



vehicle, jump clear with both feet together. Land firmly and shuffle away, keeping your feet close together for at least 35 feet — farther if the ground is wet. And make sure to warn others to keep their distance too. Staying alert and knowing these steps can save your life. *Lucky Number: 1106072000.*

Knowledge is power and a smarter member is a better member. 🍀



— FLIP THE SWITCH EDUCATION SERIES —

What Happens in An Outage

When the lights don't come on due to an outage, our team at SLEMCO works quickly to get the lights back on. But before your power is restored there are several steps for our team to work through to make sure the problem is solved. *Lucky Number: 1213257501.*

1. Outage Report

First, we're alerted of an outage via a customer report by phone or SmartHub or we're notified by our own automated equipment.

2. Dispatcher Review & Serviceman Assignment

Next, a dispatcher reviews the outage in our outage management system. Dispatch may contact the customer who called in the outage to verify they have no power.

3. Serviceman Assessment & Repair

The dispatcher will then assign and dispatch the outage to a serviceman. The serviceman travels to the affected location and assesses the situation, repairing the issue if it's something he can fix without the help of additional crew. Otherwise he will notify the dispatcher that a crew is needed. Dispatch will send out a right-of-way, overhead or underground crew if necessary.

4. Restore Power & Clear Outage

The serviceman or crew will restore power and clear the outage with a dispatcher who then restores the outage on our outage management system.

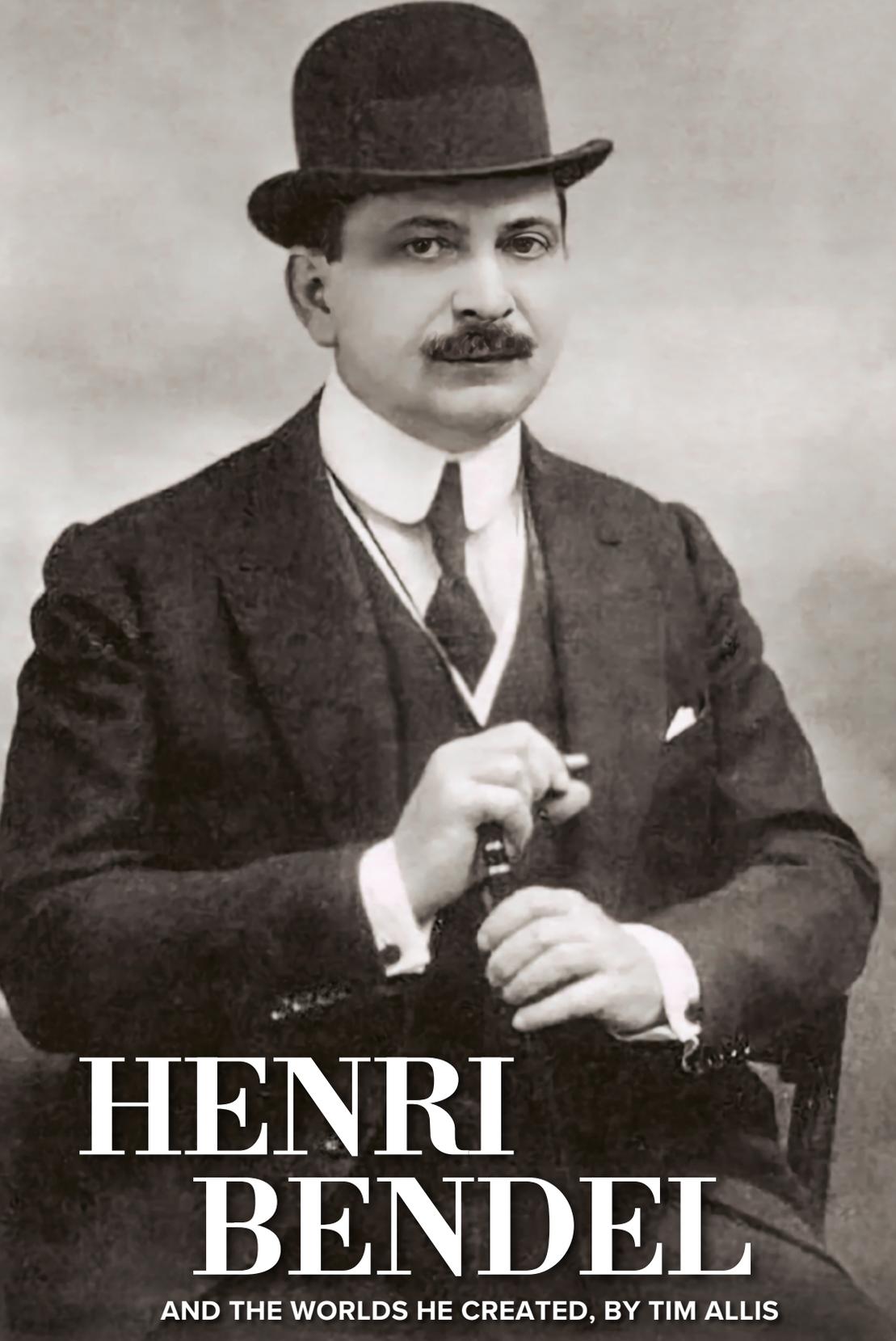
SLEMCO restoring power after an outage takes more than just the flip of a switch on our end. We work hard to ensure every step is completed with thoroughness and care to resolve the issue so your lights stay on and your rates stay low. 🍀



BE A LUCKY NUMBER
WINNER!

FIND YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER AND WIN \$100 IN CREDITS!

We've hidden 10 more SLEMCO account numbers in this issue of the magazine. If you find your SLEMCO account number, call Michelle Courvelle at (337) 896-2504. Once she verifies you as a winner, she'll credit \$100 to your SLEMCO account. Good Luck! 🍀



HENRI BENDEL

AND THE WORLDS HE CREATED, BY TIM ALLIS

Henri Bendel in his early New York years.

Depending on how old you are, it might have gone something like this: Wasn't there some Frenchman who had a big fashion store in New York, but was related to somebody in Lafayette and used to visit here? Or: His name just sounded French, he actually grew up in Lafayette, Bendel Gardens is named after him. Or: Henri Bendel, same as the store in New York, I went there, it was amazing, it's gone now. Or even: I have no idea what you're talking about.

story by JAMES EDMUNDS

One-time Bendel Gardens denizen Tim Allis, a noted New York fashion journalist and the author of *Henri Bendel and the Worlds He Fashioned*, newly published by the UL Press, undertook the book project at least partly because he was fascinated that a man who had been a famous, key figure in the fashion world a century ago, all the while keeping a close connection to his Louisiana family, could be so nearly forgotten by his native land in just a few generations.

"I felt like there were a million shards to this story and no one had ever pulled them together," Allis recalls, noting that though Bendel's public persona was richly documented, there was surprisingly little in the way of intimate family and friend correspondence and similar resources that biographers and historians rely on. "The material was thin and I tried to connect the dots."

The compelling, informative and entertaining book that Allis created not only connects the dots, it provides the rich contextualization required to help current day readers to understand who Bendel was, within the milieu that he occupied.

Henry Bendel was born in Vermilionville, LA (soon to change its name to Lafayette, as Henry's name would evolve into Henri over many long years of travels to France) in 1868, to a family of immigrant merchants. He graduated from St. Charles College in Grand Coteau. He could have then easily stepped into his family's growing and successful business empire. His mother, though, Mary Plonsky Bendel Falk (remarried after the death of her husband when Henry was six), who by all accounts was a brilliant businesswoman as well as a supportive

influence on her son, staked him with enough cash to spread his wings.

He worked in merchandising and millinery in New Orleans and Morgan City before moving to New York City in 1899. In New York, he began with a hat shop which before long expanded into custom made dresses, often copying or emulating the latest designs

Courtesy of Bendel family

he regularly traveled to Paris to see. In 1913, he opened the eponymous department store on 57th street, which survived dozens of years after his death. Along the way, his frequent reports in the fashion press made him a beacon of couture information for style-conscious women not only in New York but throughout America. *Lucky Number: 4501263815.*

“Henri was a really big deal,” Allis says. “He made his way to success in the big city, but managed to keep his connection to Louisiana.” Throughout his career, Bendel returned to Lafayette frequently, and in his later years began a project to create a magnificent retirement residence on the Vermilion River.



From the Illustrated Milliner, courtesy of the New York Public Library.

Bendel first ascended to fashion supremacy with his much-sought-after hat designs.



Courtesy of the RISD Museum

Bendel's designs were so classical that many are preserved as museum pieces, including this golden silk dress at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum.

Henri bought a plantation property of about 180 acres and built Camellia Lodge, which was meant to be only a precursor to a resplendent mansion; he had already built much-admired mansion

properties on Long Island and in Connecticut, and had he not died suddenly in 1936, might have produced a Bayou Xanadu in Lafayette. *Lucky Number: 2311348001.*

Despite heartfelt restoration attempts, that original residence has been lost, but the property still coheres as the Lafayette subdivision Bendel Gardens, one of the city's most beautiful and desirable neighborhoods.

Henri Bendel lived just long ago enough to have slipped from direct memory in his homeland, but thanks to Tim Allis's insightful and delightful book, beautifully designed by UL Press Production Manager Mary Duhé, fans of fashion and local history can revel in this marvelous story. 📖

“

Henri was a really big deal. He made his way to success in the big city, but managed to keep his connection to Louisiana.

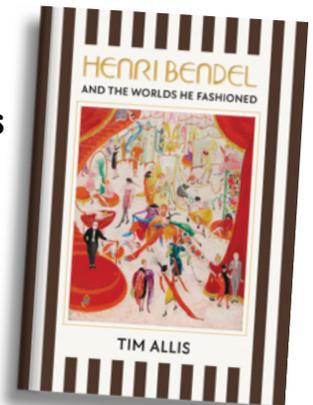


Photo by Michael Lionstar

Tim Allis

The book's design evokes the fashion world that Henri Bendel inhabited



Photo by Brian Jamise

Henri Bendel survived as a brand and a store for many decades after his death. Many a SLEMCO Power reader will have passed through these doors on Fifth Avenue.

Rayne Frog Festival



Photos courtesy of City of Rayne

“April showers bring May flowers”—so the saying goes—and May brings the spotlight on...well...frogs, the unkissed princes celebrated in the city of Rayne. There’s hardly an area of the city that doesn’t acknowledge its treasured mascot, keeping momentum for the annual Frog Festival, this year celebrating its 54th year on May 7-9.

So, what’s the story with the frogs, many visitors ask. Louisiana has long been one of the two top frog-producing states. In the 1800s, Donat Pucheu, a French immigrant and gourmet chef, saw the potential for selling frog legs to New Orleans restaurants. As the demand grew, Pucheu enticed fellow Parisians, the Weil brothers, to join him in Rayne.

Following their friend, Jacques, Edmond and Gontran Weil started a company to export local produce and wild game, including locally harvested bullfrogs to restaurants across the U.S. and France, where fried frog legs were a delicacy. The booming business soon established Rayne as the “Frog Capital of the World,” with the first frog derby taking place in 1946 at the Rice Festival in Crowley.

Two frogs even made their way to space in 1970 as part of a mission to test the effects of weightlessness on their tiny inner ears, which are surprisingly similar to ours.

After the passing of the Weil brothers, other Rayne businessmen continued to export frog legs until the industry came to an end in the 70s. But the city continued to honor this unique history and the frog’s contributions with the establishment of the Frog Festival in 1973.

Today the frog derby remains a main attraction at the festival, whose co-chair, Marietta Leonards, notes that the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries allows a specific number of frogs to be caught for the event, all of which are safely returned to the wild afterward. 🐸



Homage to the bloated, goggle-eyed croakers has gone beyond the annual festival and become the city’s identity, a story told in over two dozen murals, starting at the I-10 overpass at the Rayne exit. At last count, there are 110 frog statues scattered around town, from an old-time bank teller and a frog pulling a wagon to another wearing a wig, most of them specially decorated at festival time. It’s a year-round celebration of the amphibian that most of us keep an arm’s length away.



Activities in the “Hopper”

Arts & Crafts and Carnival Rides

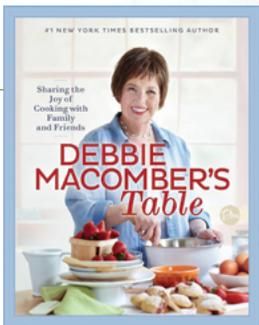
Frog Petting for the Kids

Cajun Cuisine
...including frog legs

The Frog Cook-off
Back by popular demand and with every imaginable frog-based recipe

The Royal Court
A chance to meet this year’s Frog Queen, Emily Chiasson

Live Entertainment
This year’s lineup brings Louisiana legend **Wayne Toups** on May 8 at 10:00 pm, and don’t miss **John Foster**, runner-up from American Idol Season 23, performing May 9 at 11:00 pm



let's get COOKING

Easter brings to mind eggs, green veggies, strawberries and Lent.

Debbie Macomber's Table offers some bright-tasting, delicious recipes to celebrate these – and the arrival of spring. You can purchase it from Amazon for \$14.

Broccoli Apple Cheddar Salad

Serves 8 to 10 (or more if used as a side dish)

Dressing

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 2 tbs. apple cider vinegar
- 2 tbs. plus 2 tsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. poppy seeds

Salad

- 8 cups broccoli florets
- 1 cup chopped unpeeled apples
- 8 ozs. sharp cheddar cheese, cut into ½-inch cubes
- ¾ cup dried cranberries
- ½ cup sunflower seeds
- ¾ cup sliced almonds

MAKE THE DRESSING:

In a small bowl, whisk together the mayonnaise, vinegar and sugar until well blended. Stir in the poppy seeds. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

PREPARE THE BROCCOLI:

Fill a large bowl with ice water and set aside.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the broccoli and cook for 30 seconds. Drain the broccoli and immediately place it in the ice water. Let it cool in the water for at least 5 minutes. Drain well, lay on paper towels or a dish towel and cover with another paper towel or dish towel.

ASSEMBLE THE SALAD:

In a large bowl, combine the apple, cheese, cranberries, sunflower seeds and almonds. Add the broccoli. Pour in the dressing (to your preference) and mix gently until well combined. Refrigerate until ready to serve.



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

Spinach-Artichoke Lasagna

Serves 8 to 10

If you leave the bacon out, you have a delicious meatless dish for Lent. Even better, add a pound of shrimp!

- 10 lasagna noodles
- 1 (16-oz.) container cottage cheese
- 3 eggs
- 1 (9-oz.) box frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 1 (9-oz.) box frozen artichoke hearts, thawed and chopped
- 1 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- ½ tsp. garlic powder
- 10 slices bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 lbs. Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
- 1 cup shredded (or grated) Parmesan cheese

Cook the lasagna noodles according to the package directions, then drain.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the cottage cheese and eggs.

In a large bowl, stir together the spinach, artichoke hearts, salt, pepper and garlic powder.

In a large skillet, cook the bacon over medium heat until soft, about 5 minutes. Do not let it crisp. Remove to a paper-towel-lined plate to drain.

Layer half of the noodles over a 9 x 13-inch baking pan. Spread half of the cottage cheese mixture over them. Make a layer of half of the vegetable mixture, then half of the Monterey Jack cheese, then half of the Parmesan cheese. Repeat the layers and spread the bacon evenly over all.

Bake for 30 to 35 minutes until the cheese is bubbling and the bacon is crisp. Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

The secret to creamy cheesecake is to have all your ingredients at room temperature. Make sure to allow at least one extra hour for everything to sit on the counter before beginning.



White Chocolate Cheesecake with Strawberries

Serves 10 to 12

- 1 sleeve (9 long crackers) graham crackers, crushed
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 6 tbs. (¾ cup) butter, melted and cooled
- 3 9oz. blocks cream cheese, at room temperature
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 eggs, at room temperature
- ½ cup sour cream, at room temperature
- 1½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 10 oz. white chocolate, melted and cooled
- 4 cups sliced strawberries, at room temperature



Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Position oven rack in the middle. Grease a 9-inch springform pan and place it on top of a large, double layer of heavy-duty aluminum foil (about 18 inches square.) Tightly wrap foil around the outside of the pan to create a watertight seal.

In a medium bowl, mix graham cracker crumbs, salt and melted butter until well combined. Press into the bottom and about 1 inch up the sides of the prepared pan. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until lightly browned. Remove pan from the oven and reduce oven temperature to 325 degrees.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, with the paddle attachment, beat cream cheese on medium speed for 2 minutes, or until very smooth. Add the sugar and mix well. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well between each addition. Add the sour cream, vanilla and white chocolate and mix until smooth. Pour mixture over the crust.

Set the springform pan in a 9 x 13 inch baking pan and place the pan on the middle rack of the oven. Fill the baking pan halfway with hot water. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes, until the cheesecake is almost set in the center. It should jiggle just a little.

Carefully remove the pan from the oven and let the cheesecake cool in the water bath for 30 minutes. Remove the pan from the water bath and let the cheesecake cool until almost at room temperature, about 2 hours. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours.

Run a thin knife around the inside ring of the springform pan. Release the ring and carefully remove it. Top the cheesecake with the sliced strawberries or serve them on the side.

YOU COULD WIN \$2,000

SLEMCO Scholarship Now that's a Bright Idea

Join us at our 89th Annual Meeting on Saturday, June 13 as **\$40,000 in college scholarships** will be given away to eligible candidates. Twenty students will each receive \$2,000 to assist with college or trade school expenses. The application process is straightforward, but remember to submit your application by the May 14 deadline. Members who have been associated with SLEMCO for at least one continuous year prior to the May 14 cut-off can sponsor themselves, their spouse, dependent children or legal wards. Note that grandchildren are eligible only if they are legal dependents or wards of the member. *Lucky Number: 2105050000.*

DO I QUALIFY?

To be eligible, winners must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 and plan to enroll full-time (at least 12 credit hours) in the upcoming fall semester. Applicants must be at least high school seniors.

According to IRS guidelines, parents can claim their college-age children on their tax returns until the year they turn 24. We adhere to these guidelines when awarding scholarships. To sponsor a child, parents must claim the applicant on their tax return, and the applicant must be under 24 years old at the time of application. Verification will be needed. Any eligible family member can apply each year; however, past scholarship recipients are not eligible for additional awards. *Lucky Number: 4503018500.*

WHERE CAN I USE IT?

Scholarship funds can be utilized by undergraduate students attending any public or private Louisiana university or accredited trade school on a full-time basis. This includes institutions recognized by the University of Louisiana System, Louisiana State University System, Southern University System, Louisiana Community and Technical College System, Louisiana Board of Regents Proprietary School System, Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, or the U.S. Department of Education. *Lucky Number: 1302062002.*

HOW DO I APPLY?

Applications for the 2026 SLEMCO scholarship program were sent out with February SLEMCO bills. You can also apply online by visiting our website at www.SLEMCO.com. Simply fill out your application online, and you will receive a confirmation email. The process is quick and user-friendly. Make sure to read the application carefully and adhere to all instructions. Applications will be accepted until Thursday, May 14. For delivered and electronically submitted entries, submissions must be received by 4:30 p.m. on May 14, and mailed entries must be postmarked by that day. 📧



Apply Today!

Several hundred submissions already received! While the entry deadline is set for May 14, we encourage you to submit your application early to ensure you don't miss out.



A student can receive the SLEMCO scholarship only one time. It is not renewable.

Mail your application to:
SLEMCO Scholarship Program
2727 SE Evangeline Thruway
Lafayette, LA 70508

