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Bossier City made strides in past year

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From mega-communities to new businesses and money for natural gas pockets under our homes, Bossier City has come a long way in the past year.

Villaggio

It all starts with Villaggio, Bossier City's newest community, which broke ground last year and is slated to open in February.

"I like to think about what is needed and what can be done here," said John Good Jr., the developer of Villaggio.

His newest community is an upscale 64-acre development on East Texas Street.

If Good's track record is any indication, the project should be a success. He also developed the Louisiana Boardwalk and the upscale Stonebridge community.

Villaggio (Italian for village) will have shopping, dining, swimming and boating — all within a few minutes walk. It is on U.S. Highway 80 East, just east of Swan Lake Road and west of Bossier Parish Community College. The property will be within walking distance of BPCC. Phase 1 construction is slated to cost \$80 million to \$90 million.

The development will feature a sandy-beached lake, 55,000 square feet of retail space, multifamily housing with two and three bedroom apartments, townhomes, dining, office and commercial space and a lakeside promenade with the property's trademark 45-foot clock tower. There also will be jogging/walking trails, swimming in designated areas and paddle and sailboat rentals.

All this, Good said, for apartment rentals of about \$700 to \$1,300 per month.

YMCA

The new YMCA in Bossier City also is scheduled to break ground off Benton Road near the Bossier Tennis Center. When open, the YMCA will have a state-of-the-art swimming pool and the latest in exercise equipment.

"We're meeting in January to discuss further funding," said Gary Lash, who heads up the Shreveport/Bossier YMCA.

Harrison Company

In big money news, a company controlled by former gubernatorial candidate John Georges acquired Harrison Company, a Bossier City food distributor.

Georges Enterprises already owns one grocery distribution company: Imperial Trading Co. of New Orleans. Imperial Trading has been looking throughout the region for a company to partner with. "During my campaign for governor in 2007, I talked about economic development in Louisiana, so we decided to invest right here, and Harrison is a very good company with excellent employees and management," Georges said.

Georges plans to expand total employment at Harrison by 100 to 250 people.

Cypress Inn

In restaurant news, the original owners of the landmark Cypress Inn restaurant in Bossier Parish reopened their restaurant at 5212 Airline Drive in Bossier City.

"We're using all our original recipes," said Lacy Jackson, who co-owns the Cypress Inn with her husband Reese Jackson.

The former restaurant on Cypress Bayou Reservoir burned in October 2002 and was not rebuilt until two months ago.

But those who mourned its passing will have to wait no longer.

Reese, the grandson of the original owner, found a new location on Airline Drive between Bossier City and Benton. The new restaurant, next to 24 Hour Fitness gym, has a remodeled look with exposed brick and wooden tables.

"We're the third generation of owners and we're using the same recipes that made the original Cypress Inn so popular," Lacy said.

Indeed, recipes such as marinated crab claws, frog legs and blackened catfish with baked potato, yeast roll and a garden salad are still a large draw for customers. There is a lunch menu, children's menu and desserts including peach or apple cobbler.

Some of the money that you spend at the new Cypress Inn may have been procured by the Haynesville Shale.

Haynesville Shale

The Haynesville Shale consists of natural gas pockets that are believed to be underneath all or parts of Bossier, Caddo, DeSoto, Webster, Bienville, Red River, Natchitoches and Sabine parishes and east Texas. The natural gas reserve is being touted as potentially larger than the Barnett Shale, which is generally in 16 to 21 counties around and near Fort Worth, Texas, and continues to hold the reputation of being the largest onshore natural gas field in the United States.

A company called TwinCities Development offered area residents money for their rights to those underground minerals and so far, several communities have received windfalls.

The Shreveport company was offering people whose property sits on top of possible gas reserves or Haynesville Shale, \$1,500 an acre plus with a share of a 20 percent property owner's royalty. The three-year lease can be optioned for another two years.

TwinCities then sent out copies of lease agreements to area residents. The leases would allow the company and its affiliate, Chesapeake Energy Corp., the third-largest natural gas producer in the U.S., the right to drill beneath their properties for natural gas pockets trapped in the underground formations.

Meet your neighbor

Thirty-four-year-old Bradley Huie has autism, but that hasn't stopped him from writing a book.

"I'm like the Rain Man," said Huie, comparing himself to Dustin Hoffman's autistic character in the 1988 film by the same name. "I have a message and that's, 'Don't give up on your hopes and dreams and what God has given you because we each have a different piece of the puzzle.'"

Huie was in his teens before anyone could put a label on his "piece of the puzzle." That's when he was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, a neurological disorder that makes communication and social interaction difficult. Some experts believe Asperger's could be a form of high-functioning autism.

Now, Huie and his mother, Cherylyn Grant, want to share their experience with Asperger's, from the child's and parent's points of view. The two co-authored a book, "What is it About Me You Do Not Understand? Living the Life of Autism and Asperger's."

"It's about me, about where I've been and what I do," Huie said. But it's also "a survivor's guide that talks about milestones, challenges and what to do in certain situations."

Academy Sports + Outdoors

In store news, Stirling Plaza off Airline Drive in Bossier City opened a new Academy Sports + Outdoors store. The new store has an area for trying out golf swings and a computer that measures just how far those golf balls have gone.

"It's a popular item," said Tim Carroll, who works the golf area with Wallace.

The store's success since it opened is no surprise to David Battye, Academy regional general manager.

"We put our new store in Bossier City because we thought we'd do well there," he said.

Academy Sports + Outdoors is based in Katy, Texas. The store sells almost everything to do with sports, including clothing, boats, swim gear, basketball, baseball and football gear, guns, fishing rods, exercise equipment and much more.
