

THE LIGHTHOUSE

A PUBLICATION OF THE MUSEUM OF THE GULF COAST

A close-up portrait of an older man with white hair, wearing a black fedora, gold-rimmed glasses, a black suit jacket, and a black shirt. He is smiling slightly and has his hands clasped in front of him. He is wearing a gold ring on his left ring finger and a gold watch on his left wrist.

Winter 2021

"Jivin' Gene" Bourgeois
The Birth of Swamp Pop

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Winter 2021

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from **The Director**

Well, I have to comment once again on our new newsletter format. This is our 2nd edition under the name of *The Lighthouse*. We are proud of the new look and are looking forward to the new ways to keep you up-to-date on the happenings and the broad range of exciting subject material we are preparing to share with you in the coming months and years. Be sure to check out this edition's story about our own "Jivin' Gene" Bourgeois.

Yes, 2021 is here; however, it seems to feel a lot like 2020. Our Music Hall of Fame Inductee Don Rollins wrote the Alan Jackson/Jimmy Buffet Country Music Hall of Fame Song of the year in 2003, "5 O'clock Somewhere." It refers to a popular expression used to justify drinking at



Don Rollins with his Grammy

any time of day, given that somewhere in the world, it's 5:00 p.m. (the end of the workday for a traditional "nine-to-five" worker.) Well, I have now heard that a new song needs to be written by our friend Don to the effect that it still feels like 2020, and it is okay to drink anytime.

We have many great things staged and ready to go when more are vaccinated, and the pandemic confinements are relaxed. In any event, know again that you can visit us now as museums are considered one of the safest places to visit. Hope to see you soon, and THANK YOU, one and all, for your generous contributions and support during these rough times. Everyone here at the Museum of the Gulf Coast and in this community is grateful for your generosity.

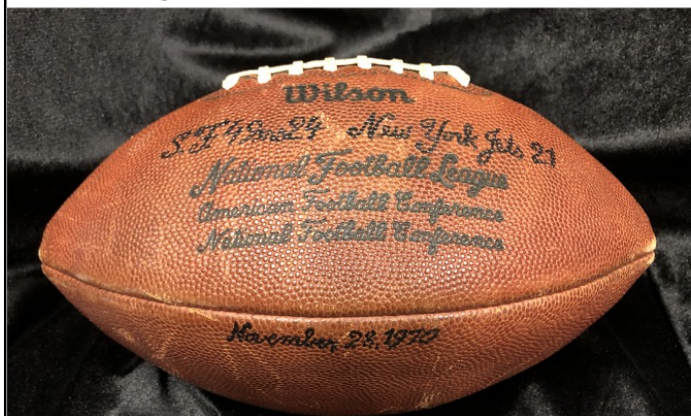


Tom Neal



OUR COLLECTIONS

This football is a recent gift to the Museum from Johnny Fuller. A standout athlete at Lamar, Fuller qualified for the 1968 Olympic trials in the decathlon. He played eight seasons as a safety in the National Football League for the San Francisco 49ers and New Orleans Saints. Fuller intercepted this football in a game between the 49ers and the Jets. In Joe Namath's last game, he was leading the Jets down the field for the go-ahead touchdown when Fuller intercepted the pass, thwarting the comeback. It was the last interception thrown by Namath.



Fuller's intercepted football thrown by Namath



In 1967, Fuller led the Division II in punt return average (19.6 yards)

High School T's

T-Shirts from Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Bishop Byrne, and Stephen F. Austin high schools can be purchased on our Museum of the Gulf Coast website. Go to MuseumoftheGulfCoast.org and navigate to Gift Shop.



The Sabine Hotel



Closed since the late 80's, The Sabine Hotel is the most visible and invisible structure in Port Arthur. Its ten stories still tower over downtown, but it is largely forgotten. Originally the Vaughn Hotel, it was labeled the finest of its kind on the Gulf Coast when it opened in 1929. Dr. E. W. Vaughn from Kentucky invested an enormous amount of money in the building's construction.

Chandeliers were strung from one end of the second-floor event room to the other. The stock market crash five months after it opened dashed many of the builder's plans. Decades later, The Sabine was converted to apartments, and empty refrigerators and stoves still occupy many of the rooms. Opulent living spaces on the ninth and tenth floors provided spectacular views over Sabine Lake and Louisiana. The vestiges of dumbwaiters, and Murphy beds can

The reading nook of a past tenant.

still be seen in some of the rooms. A throwback to a more elegant time. For now, though, a wind driven fan in the stairwell turns silently as it has perhaps for 90 years. The Sabine waits quietly for its return to prominence. - Robert Fong



A child's teddy bear abandoned in a chair.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN



Gene and The Jokers (Jivin' Gene pictured far right)

The Lighthouse spoke with Swamp Pop icon "Jivin' Gene" Bourgeois about what led to his childhood interest in music.

"My mother was from Abbeville, Louisiana. So I would go in the summertime to visit my grandma, and I was about 12 or 13, and I met Warren Storm (which his name is Warren Schexnider), and I met Bobby Charles. I was running around with all my older cousins, and I got to meet all these guys way back then before we ever really got into any kind of music. So it all fit together. I don't know how it happened or why it happened, but those guys, they did real well. At that time, in South Louisiana, they didn't care much about how old you were. You could go to a nightclub and dance or maybe even get yourself five beers as long as you could put the money on the counter. I thought I was hot stuff, and I got to go to dances, and they were just regular friends of my cousins as well."

One day Gene's brother, Kenneth, brought a guitar home. "He was at a deer hunting camp with one his buddy's, Harry Waddell. He gave Kenneth a little Stellar guitar, and he brought it home, and Kenneth was

gonna learn how to play. I just fell in love with that guitar, and I got me a Mel Bay guitar chord book, and I just self-taught myself how to play rhythm guitar and a little bit of lead. And that's how it happened. I got started with music just because my brother brought that guitar home. Then eventually, a few of my buddies, we got together. John Pigott was one of my friends and Butch Landry. John played guitar, and Butch played the drums, and then we started listening to 45's, and learning some songs. We started out with like a little garage band practicing, and a guy named Jimmy Fowler played piano for us. We started playing at sock hops, and high school functions. They had a place called the Beehive in Port Arthur, where it was a club that you belonged to that the teenagers gathered together and shot pool and we had dances and everything. They let us play and I think we got all the crawfish we could eat or something like that for our pay, and that's how we got started. The original band that I had (probably still in high school) it was called Gene and the Saints. Later on, with different musicians, which included Raymond and Louis Solis, Tommy Savant, and Benny Falcon on the drums, and a horn player called Clarence Hicks, we were Gene and the Jokers. We were playing out at Stewart's club, which was the club by the Rainbow Bridge."

Producer Huey Meaux had a cajun music program on KPAC, the radio station of Port Arthur College, and came out to Stewart's one night. Gene had already written and was performing what would become his two biggest hits, "Out With the Tide," and "Breaking Up is Hard to Do." He asked Meaux if he would like to record his songs.

"I think I was the first English-speaking, not cajun recording, that Huey did."

Soon the band's 45's were flying off the shelves. "They had Boneau Record Shop on Gulfway Drive. Mrs. Boneau helped a lot of local musicians. And they had the Record Rack in Beaumont, and a lady named Vivian also helped a lot of us get started."

The first recording session is now the stuff of legend. To keep the costs down with an unproven talent, Meaux recorded "Out With the Tide" at the radio station. Gene's vocal tracks were recorded in the restroom. Bourgeois states with a chuckle that Meaux "polished the apple a little" in the telling of it. Meaux also gave Jivin' Gene his nickname. Bourgeois, and his buddies from Abbeville would go on to become Swamp Pop legends. - Robert Fong



Jivin' Gene Bourgeois

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An Enduring Legacy



Babe Didrikson Zaharias was born on June 26, 1911, in Port Arthur, Texas, to Norwegian immigrants Hannah and Ole Marie. Hanna was a talented figure skater and skier in Norway. Ole was an accomplished carpenter. Their house once stood on what is now 2332 W Rev Dr. Ransom Howard St. An historical marker, in a vacant lot, is all that remains of Babe's birth home in Port Arthur. Babe's family moved to Beaumont when she was three years old. As a young girl, Babe was very competitive and did not shy away from sports considered improper for girls. Her father instilled in her the importance of physical training and built her a makeshift weight set out of a broomstick.



Babe played every sport in high school, even football, but she excelled most at basketball. She was recruited by Melvin J. McCombs, the coach for the best women's basketball team, the Golden Cyclones. She soon took an interest in track & field events and eventually participated in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics. She broke four world records; she won the javelin throw, 143 feet, 4 inches, and won the 80-meter hurdles, twice shattering the previous world record (her best time was 11.7 seconds). She still holds the World Record for the longest baseball throw at 296 feet.

In 1935 Babe took up the game of golf. Initially denied amateur status, she eventually competed in the Los Angeles Open (the first woman to compete in a men's pro tournament). As fate would

have it, she was partnered with George Zaharias, a well-known pro-wrestler. They were married a few months later and moved to Tampa, Florida. Didrikson became the first female golf celebrity. She sewed her own outfits and conquered each tournament with graceful yet brazen competitiveness.

She was so dominant her many accomplishments are too numerous to mention. Zaharias won the 1946 U.S. Women's Amateur and the 1947 British Ladies Amateur – the first American to achieve this – and three Women's Western Opens. Turning pro in 1947, Didrikson quickly dominated the sport. Immensely popular, she was a vital part of the founding of the Ladies Professional Golf Association in 1950. That same year, she accomplished the Grand Slam-winning the U.S. Open, the Titleholders Championship, and the Women's Western Open.

In 1952 she was diagnosed with colon cancer. Her health declined rapidly, but she

recovered enough to win the 1954 Women's Open Championship by 12 strokes, a record that still stands. Zaharias also served as the president of the LPGA from August 1952 to July 1955. On September 27, 1956, she died of her illness at the age of forty-five at John Sealy Hospital in Galveston, Texas. Her husband, George Zaharias, set up a foundation in her name to support cancer research. On January 7th, 2021, the Presidential Medal of Freedom was posthumously awarded to her by President Donald Trump.

- *Brittany Delagarza*



2 gold medals, 10 Major golfing titles



Thanks to W.J. "Bill" LeBlanc and Jude LeBlanc this pirogue is now a featured part of our Natural History section at the Museum of the Gulf Coast. The donation adds to the rich story we tell of the region. Bill LeBlanc obtained the pirogue roughly 40 years ago. Made of a single piece of Louisiana Cypress. It is thought to be over 200 years old.

Memorials

Donations

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Debra Campanella

Judy Moore

Jim and JoAnn Armstrong

Regina Draham

Since our last publication, two legendary members of our Sports Hall of Fame have died. **Billy Tubbs**, the charismatic basketball coach of the Lamar University Cardinals, who for two years put Lamar Basketball on the national stage, passed away in November. He led Lamar's 1979-80 team to the sweet sixteen before losing to Magic Johnson and the eventual champions, Michigan State University. His Oklahoma Sooners team also played for the National Championship in 1988. He was twice named the college basketball coach of the year by Basketball Weekly. He is the 28th coach in the history of NCAA basketball to achieve 600 wins.

Buddy Davis from Nederland was both a college and professional basketball player, competing for five seasons in the NBA. His most notable achievement was winning a gold medal at the 1952 Olympics held in Helsinki, Finland, in the high jump. Davis set the world record at 6' 11 5/8" at the 1953 Amateur Athletic Union Championships.

Thank you

The Museum of the Gulf Coast wishes to thank our steadfast supporters of the Port Arthur Historical Society. Your generous contributions are a vital part of our effort to preserve the storied history of this region. Those members and non-members who wish to contribute a memorial in the name of a loved one, or make a donation, call (409) 999-6282, email us at MuseumoftheGulfCoast@gmail.com, or go to MuseumoftheGulfCoast.org



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