



**For Immediate Release:
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Letter to the Editor Parish Government Day Hammond, LA – October 27, 2020

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Dear Editor,

Leadership Tangipahoa did not start out quite as we had planned this year. Our first class scheduled in September was cancelled due to hurricane Laura's possible impact to our area. Fortunately, we were spared and continue to pray for our neighbors to our west. Our first session was an introduction to Tangipahoa Parish Government. Our visit with our local leaders was a positive and informative experience. You don't realize how much and how hard

our government officials and staff are working for our parish until you get a behind-the-scenes view of it all.

Our day started in Amite in the Tangipahoa Parish Council Chambers. Parish President Robby Miller welcomed us and spoke to us about all the reasons “We are the best parish in the state.” He also gave us insights on how they’ve streamlined operations in the parish to help processes run smoothly for all departments so they can assist residents and businesses with a strong emphasis on customer service.

Before heading to the courthouse, we also had an overview of the process of our parish council members from Tangipahoa Parish Council Chairman Carlo Bruno. He gave examples of his experiences as a council member and the progress they have made to better our parish over the last several years.

Director of Finance, Jeff McKneely then presented the parish’s 2021 Operating and Capital Improvement Budget. He explained how 76% of the parish sales tax is utilized for road and bridge operations and the road overlay program, with the general fund operating on 24%. This put into perspective how important it is to shop local.

We then heard from Tina Roper, Director of Workforce Development, on the programs they offer to employers and job seekers. They assist employers on many levels from job postings, on-the-job-training, to recruiting events. They also provide resume workshops for job seekers along with career counseling and interview tips. Covid has been a challenge for employers and applicants but they are working through it by providing virtual interviews and job fairs.

From there we walked over to the Tangipahoa Parish Courthouse. Clerk of Court, Gary Stanga and Chief Deputy Clerk of Court, Alicia Fussell gave us a full tour of the Clerk of Courts office. They explained the many roles their office has for filing court documents, birth certificates, marriage license, minutes and record keeping. We finished up our tour of the courthouse in the Assessor’s Office. Brady Sledge, Chief Deputy Assessor, explained the assessment process and the Geographic Information System (GIS) they have in place. It is a web-based system that provides real time information such as flood data, parcel, and assessment data.

As the day progressed, the Leadership Tangipahoa Class of 2021 was given the incredible opportunity to tour the impressive Emergency Operation Center located in Amite, LA. The presentation given by Director of Homeland Security, Dawson Primes, was extremely informative. We learned so much about how the building was funded through a FEMA Safe Room Grant. Because 2020 has had such an active and threatening hurricane season, everyone in the class saw, not only the importance for a structure such as the Operations Center, but how the structure is an absolute necessity for having a centralized location for all responder agencies in the Parish. Mr. Primes went on to discuss how the floods of 2016, both March and August each provided learning opportunities for the parish to perfect and improve upon in the coming years. A few of the impressive elements of the structure include thick concrete walls, positive airflow system, extensive back-up radio system among so many other things.

Our next stop was the Florida Parishes Arena. Many residents of the parish may have the perception that it is an agricultural facility, but Director Kelly Wells explained it has been used for a wide variety of events. The multi-purpose event room was being used for early voting during our visit and has been host to many events including banquets, weddings, and even our Leadership Tangipahoa class meet-and-greet in August.

The class was overall pleasantly and perhaps unexpectedly impressed by the Tangipahoa Parish Landfill. When driving through the area, many of the class participants expressed shock and disbelief how nice the area looked. It was evident that many environmentally safe procedures are put in place to maintain the waste process. Our guide discussed the use of an oxidation pond on the premises and the use of wells to monitor the ground water on all sides of the landfill. Even still, there is room for improvement, and there is a possibility of moving to an evaporation process for the water in the future. We learned that citizens of Tangipahoa Parish who live outside a municipality can drop off personal waste items by presenting their valid Louisiana ID. Recycling is also available six days a week.

Moving on to Hammond, we visited the Tangipahoa Parish Government Complex on Club Deluxe Road. Our first stop was the Tangipahoa Mosquito Abatement District. Dennis Walette and his staff gave us a tour of their building. In the lab, we learned how mosquitoes are trapped and then tested for disease such as West Nile. The quantity of mosquitos found in a certain area help determine how often an area is sprayed. They also track where certain species are found.

We walked next door to Animal Control next and toured their facility. We learned that Animal Control has partners with Wings of Hope which is a non-profit rescue. They have been flying animals from Hammond to states in the north that have empty shelters. The dogs are adopted once they arrive.

Our final stop of the day was the Clausen Building which houses the parish planning department, environmental services, and economic development to name a few. Numerous department heads spent a few minutes each explaining their position with the parish and a little about what their departments are responsible for. Bridget Bailey, Director of Community Development, Nic Leblanc, Building Official, Ginger Cangelosi, Tangipahoa Economic Development and John Dunnington, Chief Information Officer each gave a brief overview of the day-to-day operations in their departments.

After a very robust and informative day, everyone in the Leadership Tangipahoa Class expressed feelings of excitement and a consensus that Tangipahoa Parish is growing and thriving under the direction of Parish President Robby Miller and his exceptional team. We ended the day with a discussion about how to get more involved in the development of Tangipahoa's economic and educational growth. All class participants feel lucky to have this opportunity to learn and be a part of the growing success of the best parish in Louisiana. We are so grateful to each person who took time out of their day to welcome us into their office. We would like to thank Tangipahoa Parish Government for providing breakfast and the Florida Parishes Arena staff for preparing a delicious lunch for us.

Lastly, we would like to thank Tangipahoa Parish Government, Tangipahoa Parish Economic Development and the Tangipahoa Parish Library for their student sponsorship this year. This opportunity would not be possible without their support and we look forward to all the things we will learn this year.

Sincerely,

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Leadership Tangipahoa Class of 2020-2021



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