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Contact:**

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Joseph Dominick  
(985) 249-2902  
[jdominick@fpjdc.org](mailto:jdominick@fpjdc.org)**

## **Letter to the Editor – Hidden Treasures Day Hammond, LA – December 22, 2020**

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**Authors: Ronald Genco & Stormy Norman**



Dear Editor,

On Tuesday, December 15, 2020, the 2020-2021 class of Leadership Tangipahoa explored a few of the “Hidden Treasures” found in our parish. The session was sponsored

by Tangi Tourism and was focused on the wonderful things we have in our parish for visitors and residents.

Our journey began at the Tangipahoa Parish Convention and Visitors Bureau (TPCVB) office on Wardline Road in Hammond. Breakfast was provided for the group and we were greeted by Ms. Carla Tate, Executive Director, Ms. Dana Monistere, Operations Manager, and Ms. Emily Matisse, Director of Sales. Ms. Tate gave the group an overview of their mission and explained that Tangi Tourism does not receive state funds but operates on a four percent occupancy tax collected by hotels, campgrounds, and bed and breakfast establishments. "Heads in beds" takes on special meaning to this group as it directly relates to the amount of funding they receive to promote the parish. The ladies discussed the recent films that have been shot in Tangi and how they are ready in an instant to assist a movie company find the ideal spot for their movie or specific area for a scene. Also, we discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry in Tangi and how the sports industry was one of the first to recover and began to bring people back to Tangi. The Tangi Tourism staff is a treasure itself and is enthusiastic about ensuring all visitors have an enjoyable experience and is a great resource for residents to promote Tangipahoa Parish.

After leaving the TPCVB office, we were headed to Independence to visit the Independence Italian Cultural Museum located at 524 Pine Street. Upon arrival, we were welcomed by Mayor Jim Paine and Mr. Donnie Orlando, Museum President. Mr. Orlando spoke about the history and purpose of the museum and that it is housed in the former Mater Dolorosa Catholic Church that was built in 1908. The group toured the facility and viewed the numerous old photographs, artifacts, and documents that tells the story of the Italian people in the area. The museum began in 1980 and has slowly been a work in progress as it is one of five Italian Museums in the United States. The most recent addition to the museum is an outdoor pizza oven. Mr. Orlando and his staff discussed several events they host such as Cucuzza Day and Sicilian language classes.

After leaving the museum, we headed to Amite to visit St. Helena Catholic Church located at 122 S. First Street. Upon arrival, we were greeted by Ms. Tina Mussachia, who would be our guide on the tour. We began our journey at the Full of Grace gift shop that offers a wide variety of religious gifts. We were given a very thorough and informative tour of the church and its grounds. The tour included St. Peter's Courtyard that features Apostle sculptures, the Garden of Gethsemane that features a beautiful sculpture of Jesus praying, the Adoration Chapel that allows individuals a quiet place to pray, a display of 151 verified and sealed sacred church artifacts. The grounds contain a Parish Hall that has multiple roles for the families of the church and a retirement house for priests that consists of four apartments. Father Mark Beard is the Pastor of St. Helena Catholic Church and has been in that capacity for 10 years. Father Mark spoke to the group in St. Peter's Courtyard and spoke on his journey to the priesthood and how he came to St. Helena Catholic Church. Also, he reviewed the steps and processes that were taken for the church to grow during his tenure. Currently, St. Helena Catholic Church has 500 families registered and is a popular spot for retreats and tours.

Our next stop was Covey Rise located at 24009 Singing Waterfall Road in Husser, Louisiana. We were greeted by Grady Seal and hopped on a flatbed trailer for a tour of the farm and an overview of how their agricultural business was started. They started growing produce on 10 acres in 2009 with a plan of loading up the produce in trucks and going to restaurants where the chefs could select the fresh vegetables needed for their menu. The farm has grown to over 50 acres of farmland and now has added a local produce club where individuals can sign up for a weekly produce box with several pickup locations. Mr. Seal went through the various vegetables that are grown and we toured the packing and cooler facilities. Lunch was sponsored by Tangi Tourism and was prepared by the staff of Covey Rise. During lunch, Mr. James "Jimbo" Geisler, owner, gave the group a brief history and overview of the property. He explained how Covey Rise began in 1999 as a hunting lodge and how they have kept that aspect of the business but have evolved into a place where corporate retreats and family getaways can take place. In 2002, a lake was added along with 18 cabins built around the lake with a plan to add more with an event center with a restaurant and bar. Mr. Geisler shared some exciting news with the group that in September 2021, Covey Rise will host the South/Central Regional Shooting Championship. This is a competition that will bring contestants, their families, and spectators from all regions of the United States to Tangipahoa Parish for the duration of the event.

Our next stop was the Revival Art House at 495 SW Railroad Avenue in Ponchatoula. This business is a year old and was started by three local artists that showcase the artwork of local artists and sell their pieces on consignment. The shop has something for everyone whether you are looking for a painting of a South Louisiana scene, an alligator skin money clip, or a cypress wood carving. Even if you are not an art lover it is worth the trip to stop in and look at the work of the talented artists we have in the area. In the coming months, the ladies plan to launch the Art Bus which will allow them to bring art classes, paint parties, etc. to you. Be on the lookout for it as you cannot miss it.

Leaving Ponchatoula, the group headed to Hammond with a scheduled stop at Gnarly Barley located at 1709 Corbin Road. Zac Caramonta, co-owner, met and welcomed the group. He explained how he and his wife began brewing beer in their garage and a short time after started Gnarly Barley in 2014. He explained the ingredients they use and the steps they follow to brew their product. Also, the group was able to watch the canning and packing process. We toured their storage facility where Mr. Caramonta shared his plans to expand the shipping of their beers to the entire state by mid-year 2021.

We finished the day where we started it, the Tangi Tourism office to reflect on the hidden treasures we visited and discuss the many hidden treasures in our parish that we were not able to visit. We discussed the financial impact tourism has on the parish and the realization of how much we have in our own backyard to see and do.

The 20-21 Leadership Tangipahoa group would like to thank all the people who took time out of their busy day to talk to us about their hidden treasure. A big thank you to the staff at Tangi Tourism for sponsoring the day and for all each of you do on a daily basis to

promote our parish. We would be remiss if we did not thank Nick Gagliano as he moves us from place to place on time.

We encourage our residents to get out a visit the hidden treasures we have in our backyard.

Sincerely,

Stormy Norman

Ron Genco



Ron Genco  
Assistant Superintendent  
Tangipahoa Parish School System



Stormy Norman  
Chief Financial Officer  
Tangipahoa Parish Clerk of Court