

INFORMATION, PLEASE!

Sandra Slifer, LWVST Article—June 2009

Many of our regional and state-wide nonprofit organizations have released reports recently. Here's a short summary of what's available online for "information junkies" who always want to know more.

Bureau of Governmental Research: www.bgr.org

Who's Behind the Tree? The Homestead Exemption and Taxpayers in the New Orleans Area, March 2009

Not everyone's a winner in St. Tammany Parish if the homestead exemption is raised to \$160K. **Owners of rental property and commercial business owners will experience approximately a 34% increase in their property taxes.** An owner of a \$400K home would pay \$40 less than they do now. Of the approximately 71,320 eligible homesteads in St. Tammany Parish, 13,129 are valued for \$75K or less. If the homestead exemption was raised to \$160K, then 57% or 40,385 eligible homesteads would not pay anything for parish government services. (The name of the report is from a quote from the late Louisiana Sen. Russell Long, "Don't tax you, don't tax me. Tax that fellow behind the tree.")

The House that Uncle Sam Built-The Continued Expansion of Subsidized Housing in New Orleans, May, 2009

In this report, BGR projects that if all of the approved and planned rental housing units are built in New Orleans, that by 2012, there will be 35,700 units or approximately 25% of all homes will be some form of subsidized rental units. The report details five different types of subsidized housing units. Orleans Parish will have 70% of all subsidized housing in a seven parish area. St. Tammany Parish is projected to have only 4% of the total units. Talk about a planning nightmare: cements the concentration of poverty in Orleans and growing parishes will not have easy access to workers. It is unlikely that all of these units will be built. Now is the time for all of us to rethink these numbers; this isn't good news for Orleans or the rest of the area.

Council for a Better Louisiana: www.cabl.org

Louisiana Fact Book 2009 Edition – How do we measure up? How far do we have to go?

CABL's Fourth Edition of this report is filled with information and statistics on everything from population trends (over 70% of Louisiana residents live in urban areas), voting stats, economic indicators, Pre-K through Post-Secondary Education analysis (too many students in four year colleges and not enough workers in two year programs), public safety, health, the environment, and the ever-elusive quality of life issues.

2009 Louisiana Report Card on Major Education Indicators

This short four page report gives you a snap shot of where our education system is in comparison to the rest of the country. We're making slow progress on improving LEAP scores; we score well on accountability, but it doesn't lead to successful outcomes often enough; too many high schools are not making the grade (eight out of ten high schools failed to meet their goals); and there is the workforce gap (too many students aren't ready for the jobs that we have available). In 2008, the six-year graduation rate for Louisiana public colleges ranged from a high of 65% for LSU Baton Rouge to a low of 6% for Southern University-New Orleans. The average for the thirteen public colleges in Louisiana is 42%.

Greater New Orleans Community Data Center – www.gnocdc.org

Active Residential Addresses by Zip Code How many residents received mail in zip code 70458 in July 2005? 15,140; April 2009? 14,391; St. Tammany Parish in July 2005? 83,467; April 2009? 89,445 St. Charles, St. John, and St. Tammany are the only three parishes in the seven parish area to see gains since July 2005.

Public School Enrollment for 2000 – 2009 for the seven parishes in the New Orleans Metropolitan Statistical Area In the 2004-5 school year, St. Tammany had 36,169 students; as of February 2009, the Louisiana Department of Education stats show only 35,743. None of the seven public school systems have regained their pre-Katrina numbers. Where have all the children gone?

Public Affairs Research Council – www.la-par.org

In addition to the report that PAR issued on Redistricting Reform which I used in the last two articles, PAR has several other recent noteworthy reports.

Higher Education Governance Structure: Louisiana's Options for Keeping Pace, April 2009

This report discusses our current structure for higher education (Board of Regents and four supervising boards) and provides some direction on improving the authority, structure, and funding.

Highway Funding – Is There a Crisis? March 2009

Read it. We've got to go back to the drawing board and find new ways to fund highway and public transit construction in Louisiana.