

In and About

Washington

August 2025

FREE – TAKE ONE

How did we do it? Erasing a debt nobody thought we could

Eliminating the town's \$750,000 debt was a slow, sometimes painful process requiring the help of many people, mayor Dwight Landreneau said. While those efforts "put the town in a much better place," he cautioned, "we still aren't rolling in riches."

"It is a relief to be free of that burden," he said, "but we still face rising costs for everything we do and an income that isn't rising with it. We will still have to budget and spend carefully, or we will fall right back into another hole."

He noted "many milestones" in clearing the debt. On New Year's Day 2020 Washington had no permanent mayor, no budget, and the huge debt to pay. The town faced the prospect of a court-appointed administrator taking over its government. Retiring mayor James Olivier had just reported that "there are no longer funds to meet obligations." State auditors said the town would soon be unable to afford even basic services.

When Landreneau was appointed mayor in January 2020, he immediately began to negotiate payment plans with old creditors and to look for ways to meet recurring obligations. He also introduced a \$948,000 budget. That was \$1.6 million less than the previous budget that had been balanced only by an unrealistic projection of \$1.5 million in traffic fines. A month later, he was able to report that no takeover was imminent. For the first time in years Washington was in compliance with state financial requirements. That made us immediately eligible for \$30,000 in grants that had been frozen and opened the door for others.

By March 2021 the town's auditors found "many improvements ... in the daily operation of town business." Grants that we were once ineligible for had helped the town fix old or broken water lines. We were no longer paying to treat water only to send it into the ground. Later grants helped repair natural gas lines. Others paid for improvements that would have been otherwise impossible.

State legislators were the key to many of those funds. During the summer of 2021, Washington's legislative delegation secured \$190,000 in funding to relieve a debt owed the state, and another \$25,000 for infrastructure improvement. Later appropriations, used principally for utility system improvements and to buy needed equipment, freed some town revenue to chip away at the debt.

Careful spending helped. At the end of 2021 auditor Burton Kidder said the cost of everyday operations had been cut from \$4,432 per day five years earlier to \$2,973. Donations or purchases of used but reliable equipment allowed the town to do necessary maintenance and repair work at a savings from what contractors would charge. Sale of surplus buildings and equipment brought in money and also reduced insurance costs.

The state quit monitoring town finances at the end of 2022, largely because after years of the deficits that created the big debt we had shown small but significant surpluses for three years. By June 2024 the debt was down to \$86,000 and Landreneau said he was hopeful that it would soon but cut to zero. That happened in June.



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Of Note

NURSE PRACTITIONER

Olivia Smith at the Family Healthcare clinic in the Community Center on Veterans Memorial provides wellness visits, school physicals, cholesterol and hypertension care, diabetes and asthma care, immunizations, DOT physicals, and other services. The telephone number is (337) 826-7702.

WASHINGTON BAPTIST

offers a youth program at 6 p.m. every Wednesday.

YOU CAN DONATE to the Washington Cemetery Foundation via the Venmo payment app or by check to P.O. Box 42, Washington

Saturday.



Park cleanup

Students from Opelousas Catholic helped pull a mountain of weeds at Ethel Park during a community clean-up day. At top are Rye Coreil, Ben Hatfield, Luke Hatfield, and Kaleb Latiolais. At bottom are Olivia Hatfield, Anderson Broussard, Sam Hatfield, and Allie Marcantel. Volunteers who want to help maintain the park are asked to meet at the park at 8:30 a.m. each first and third



Legion barbeque

American Legion Post 209 offers \$12 barbequed chicken and pork dinners on the first Saturday of each month to raise funds for maintenance and repairs of the home on Hwy. 182 near Bayou Courtableau. Sponsors are needed for specific repairs. Donations are tax deductible. For information contact Dane St. Cyr at (337) 344-0469 or Don Simoneaux at (337) 209-1661.



Scholarship winners

John Rhett Chautin and Malya Robertson are the 2025 winners of Steamboat City Association scholarships given to graduating high school seniors. Chautin, a graduate of Opelousas Catholic, will major in kinesiology at McNeese State University. Robertson is a graduate of Opelousas High School and will major in nursing at LSU-Eunice.



Southland may begin hiring soon

Southland Steel Industrial Coatings is expected to begin the hiring process for its plant in Washington in August, according to Brandy Ledet, development director for Louisiana Economic Development. She said the company expects to begin moving equipment into the building in the next several months, and operations should begin in early 2026.

Parents to be notified of school bus times

Route selection for St. Landry school bus drivers was set to begin July 29, according to school superintendent Milton Batiste III.

“Once selection is complete, all schools will be notified of bus driver and student riding assignments. In addition, postcards will be mailed to families indicating bus numbers and approximate pick-up times,” he said.

Back-to-School meet August 9

A back-to-school community meeting for students from School District 5 will begin at noon on Saturday, August 9, at The Campground, 445 Campground Road in Palmetto. School and community leaders, parents, and students are invited. School supplies will be distributed. For information call Bianca Vedell, (337) 331-3004.

School calendar

Aug. 7 – First day of school
Sept. 1 – Labor Day holiday
Oct. 13-15 – Fall break
Nov. 24-28 – Thanksgiving break
Dec. 22-Jan 6 – Winter break
Feb. 16-18 – Mardi Gras holiday
March 30-April 7 – Spring break
May 20 – Last day of school



Council approves enforcement accord

The Town Council authorized the mayor and chief of police to sign an agreement to allow officers from the Opelousas marshal's office to “offer law enforcement services” in Washington. The Mutual Law Enforcement Agreement was adopted in an otherwise routine meeting July 21. The agreement allows marshal's officers to patrol in Washington. Another resolution approved a standard questionnaire required by the state legislative auditor. The document certifies that the town is in compliance with state financial regulations.

From Town Hall

THE TOWN COUNCIL is supporting an effort by the local American Legion post to invite the U.S. Marine Band to perform at the former Washington Elementary School during 2026 to help celebrate the nation's 250th birthday year.

BAYOU STATE WASTE is reminding residents that it does not handle bulky items such as appliances, mattresses, furniture, or anything too big to fit into a garbage cart. Call Morgan & Morgan Land Prep, (337) 331-5375, to schedule pickup of those items.

WASHINGTON WEATHER



August forecast:
Steamy

July 1-27

High: 97, July 22

Avg. High: 92.1

Low: 71, July 10

Avg. Low: 74.4

Avg. Temp: 83.2

5-Year Avg: 83.2

July Rainfall: 2.72

Avg. for July: 4.10

Rain for 2025: 37.41

20-Year Avg: 29.60

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Merchant saved merriest event for daughter's wedding

Washington merchant Carel Wolff found ways to have fun, even while devoting himself to community affairs and a handsomely successful business. He opened a dry goods store in New Orleans in 1855 at the age of 21 and came to Washington about 1868, when he built a large store and residence at the corner of Main and Dejean Streets. He was married to Hannah Plonsky, sister of Washington merchant Edward Plonsky, and may have come at their urging. He was not closely related, if at all, to the other Washington merchant Leon Wolff. Carel was born in Poland. Leon was born in France.



C. Wolff home and store

Diarist David Jasper McNicoll described Carel as “one of Washington’s most colorful and civic minded citizens.” One of the town’s early pieces of fire-fighting equipment “a handsome, fully equipped Hook and Ladder Truck,” was “chiefly if not altogether financed by the generosity of Mr. Wolff,” McNicoll said. In July 1875, an *Opelousas Journal* writer called a celebration by the Washington Fire Company, which had been “recently augmented” by the Carel Wolff Hook and Ladder Company, one of the “gayest pageants” the writer had ever seen. But Carel’s most glorious soiree was the marriage in 1888 of his daughter Sarah Rebecca to “the prominent young merchant” Max Klaus. The *Opelousas Courier* said it was “unquestionably the most brilliant marriage scene that ever occurred in the bayou city.”

Carel spared no expense in decorating Perseverance Hall, which stood about where Washington State Bank is today. “Throughout the building were exquisite festoons of rare and beautiful flowers which lent an air of perfume and beauty to the tableau,” the newspaper reported. Sarah’s gown and bouquet “were only equaled by her own surpassing loveliness.” Dancing lasted into the “wee hours of the morn.”

Mark the date for these St. Landry events

- ◆ Original SW La Zydeco Festival, begins 11 a.m. Aug. 30, Yambilee Arena, Opelousas
- ◆ Rendezvous in the Prairie, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. each Thursday, Prairie Acadian Cultural Center, Eunice
- ◆ Zydeco Capital Jam, 1 to 3 p.m. August 9, St. Landry Visitor Center, I-49 exit 23
- ◆ Architecture discussion 2 p.m. August 16, NUNU Art & Culture Collective, Arnaudville
- ◆ Zydeco Dance Lessons, 6 p.m. each Wednesday, Holy Ghost Church cafeteria, Opelousas
- ◆ Dulcimer Jam, 10 a.m. each Wednesday, St. Landry Visitor Center, I-49 exit 23
- ◆ La Table Français, 9:30 a.m. each Wednesday, Eunice Depot Museum, C.C. Duson Street
- ◆ La Table Français, 8:30 a.m. last Wednesday, Orphans Museum, Vieux Village, Opelousas
- ◆ La Table Français, 9:30 a.m. last Saturday, NUNU Art & Culture Collective, Arnaudville
- ◆ La Table Kreyol, 2 p.m. second Saturday, NUNU Art & Culture Collective, Arnaudville



Come see us today!

**St. Landry Visitor Center
978 Kennerson Road
(I-49 exit 23)**

**337.948.8004
cajuntravel.com**