

OANA General Meeting Minutes 07-21-2021

Turnout was excellent, as over 75 people attended the July General Meeting, held at the new St. Bernard Community Center, now located at 7143 St. Claude Ave. (old Family Dollar). The meeting began at 6:20 pm, after everyone had checked in and registered for door prizes. Members were able to pick up fresh new yard flags, and we were very happy to welcome 12 new households and two new associate members into OANA.

President Alison Barrios began by introducing the current OANA Board, and honoring past President Barry Lemoine with a card. She also acknowledged Community Center Board Members who were present, and expressed our excitement at being able to enjoy the space and have the Center in our neighborhood.

Executive Director Jamie Hornberger then outlined the Center's mission, to address food insecurity in St. Bernard Parish through various programs. These include a food pantry, a "backpack program" to help schoolchildren with their weekend needs when school meals aren't available (increased this year from 140 to 200 served weekly, and administered anonymously through the public schools), food delivery services, and more. The Center is open 9-noon Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday, and staff will refer folks with other needs to various other agencies. The Center is always looking for volunteers, both during open hours and for other services, and will accept donations of shelf-stable food and, of course, money. They can also use empty boxes.
<https://www.facebook.com/CCSTB>

Meaghan McCormack and Ross Berlin were guest speakers from the St. Bernard Economic Development Foundation. They are working to identify investments that will benefit the community, with a view to securing certification for St. Bernard to be a "Louisiana Development Ready Community", only the second in the state. They are currently developing a strategic plan, with the help of a brief survey that attendees were able to fill out during the meeting. Ideas that had already surfaced were more recreational activities (dog park, skating rink), improve drainage canals, more jobs to keep talent in the Parish, and better communication from Parish departments. Attendees suggested that Domino's and refineries need to be more open about problems that affect residents. The pair emphasized that their goal is to listen to residents and work to realize suggestions through grants and other funding. They set up a feedback table to talk with attendees after the meeting, and reiterated that THEY ARE LISTENING and are always willing to discuss ideas in person at their office, located at 100 Port Boulevard in Chalmette. They also mentioned that The Ranch film studio has recently bought the old Ford plant in Arabi, with plans to turn it into a creative space.
<https://www.sbedf.org>

Resident Chris Haines then presented the Meraux Foundation's plans for the Arabi Arts District Mural Project. The Old Arabi Cultural District was designated 7 or 8 years ago, and provides tax incentives for cultural development. The Meraux Foundation first bought the old Fastenall building, which was converted into a dozen studio spaces, now known as St. Claude Arts. Instrumental in the vision for developing that building and 3 more properties along that strip were artists Erica Larkin and Mitchell Gaudet, who

occupied a former theater as Studio Inferno, his glass forging business. A group called Art Conscious will be taking over that space, while Zeitgeist Theater and Lounge occupies a third building. Meanwhile, Meraux has acquired two more buildings: this space, now the Community Center, and the former Tales of the Cocktail building across St. Claude, with plans for its use still in progress. Haines said eight murals have been commissioned so far, through the NOLA Mural Project, and talked about the process for choosing various artists from sample works. Photos were on display of their submissions, of three of the projects underway or finished (on this building & St. Claude Arts), and of a tentative plan to turn the empty lot between Art Conscious and Zeitgeist into a public park, with the possibility of market spaces, outdoor movies, etc. He also announced that the St. Claude Streetscape (neutral ground beautification) work will resume on September 22, with a pledge to carry it to completion.
<https://merauxfoundation.org/studioarabi/>

Announcements of interest to the membership followed.

There will be no Sugar Fest this year, but instead we will host a 4-event Sippin' in the Sunset concert series:

- September 16th, Christian Serpas Duo
- October 7th, Cameron Dupuy and the Cajun Troubadours
- October 28th, Kenny Kerth Jass
- November 11th, Cypress Pop Trio

Sponsorships are available, and volunteers will be welcomed, especially to help with vendor communications.

A member survey will soon go out via email, asking for input and ideas for OANA moving forward.

Events to watch for are:

- Night Out Against Crime, our traditional October Social (date TBA by the Sheriff's Dept.)
- Trick or Treat map with participating households
- December Social / Holiday Party

We're also considering a Spring Family Fest of some sort as a new Social next year.

This year's Startup St. Bernard winner will be announced on August 5th, 2-5 p.m., at Docville Farm. The public is invited.
<https://www.startupstbernard.com>

Beautification Chair Troy Barrios said that a new Little Free Library, to replace the one at the Barn that deteriorated, is almost ready to be installed by the Old Jail. It was built by member Fritz Schroth, and should be up in a week or two. A dedication ceremony will be scheduled soon. There are thousands of these projects in the US; learn about this great book-sharing movement at their website.
<https://littlefreelibrary.org>

Door prizes — a gift certificate to The Kitchen Table Cafe and a bottle of wine — were

awarded, and attendees were invited to tour the facility.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15. The next General Meeting will be held on September 15th, again at the Community Center.