

Boating in your OWN BACKYARD



Early morning serenity awaits residents at The WaterFront on a typical day on the Amite River Diversion Canal in Maurepas.

Gone are the days of Amite River "camps"

By Annie Fugler

What seems a few short years ago, a common pastime was to take a Sunday drive down to the sleepy Amite River hamlets in Livingston Parish, hoping to get into one of two seafood restaurants most had in mind as their final destination. Unless it was a boat

race weekend, the river areas were mostly quiet except for weekend bateau fishermen and a few speed boats, some pulling skiers, pushing their Mercury or Johnson as fast as it wouldn't go.

Those parish residents owning two and three-room camps along the river - some leaning a bit,

some on wheels, but you never heard of any being blown away - waved to you as though they knew you, from their porch or yard swings, where they were spending a lazy afternoon before making the late evening trip home to start

See THE WATERFRONT, p8

THE WATERFRONT, continued from p6

another week.

Full-time residents, directly on the river, were few and community homes were spread out along the rural river properties, most on the high side of Hwy. 16 or Hwy.22. There were many acres of uninhabited and unspoiled riverbank and plenty of creosote-posted, un-railed wooden bridges from which to hang your feet and fish, recalling for me fond, yet scary, family memories from my childhood.

Well, not anymore!

Those Sunday drivers, if they haven't been down recently, wouldn't recognize the river communities of Livingston Parish today. Our waterways have become high-speed jet ways for cigarette boats, jet skis, party barges, house boats, yachts and everything in between, cruising up and down the Amite, Diversion, Blind and Petite Amite. What you rarely see is a bateau. And many of those boaters are traveling down their own "streets," headed for home. They live on the river; instead of commuting to the river for the weekend, they now commute to the cities throughout the week. Waterfront living gives new meaning to "boating in your own back yard" and these prime wet residential streets offer direct connection to Blind River, Lake Maurepas and Lake Ponchartrain.

With Baton Rouge 40 minutes away (22 miles to the Mall of LA) and the airport in New Orleans 45 minutes away, folks tired of city living, and all that goes with it, are willing to sacrifice an extra hour of sleep to commute if it means they can come home to resort-style, waterfront living everyday, right here in Livingston Parish. It is a way of life, until now, that was only found further east.



Total privacy awaits new residents of a home under construction in the exclusive WaterFront Sanctuary development in Maurepas.

From the Hwy. 22 bridge spanning the Amite River Diversion Canal, eastward to what seems like infinity, you'll see nothing but gorgeous estates with beautiful landscaping and substantial boat houses, and now some high-end condos, as well, all seeking a front-row seat on Livingston Parish's new liquid gold. Gone are the days of Amite River camps.

The "liquid gold" reference used in the eighties described an oil-rich parish but today, with the development of The WaterFront in Maurepas, the waterways of Livingston Parish are where the money is.

Glen Martin, now co-owner with brother, Dale Martin, in Blind River Properties, Inc.,

developers of The WaterFront - West, East, the Sanctuary, WaterFront Marketplace and Blind River Campsites – began the first phase of the developments in 1999. Dale, and wife Nel, WaterFront Realty's real estate broker, joined the project in 2002.

"The concept for the 32,000 acres owned by Blind River Properties was to provide something 'a cut above,'" said Dale, "and Glen set about making The WaterFront the premier community on the water."

It's probably safe to say that The WaterFront isn't just the place to live on the Diversion; it's the crème de la crème of all waterways.

All lots in The WaterFront are situated on the same six-mile street, paralleling the "street paved with gold," the Diversion. Naturally, every lot is on the water, and developments have underground utilities, paved streets, streetlights, fiber optic communications, full bulkheading and blanket permits from the Corps to build a boat house. All home plans require approval of an architectural review committee to protect everyone's investment; no round purple houses. And a major investment is what people are making here but making it they are; there is no shortage of buyers.

"Hurricanes Rita and Katrina created such a buyer/seller market in Greater Baton Rouge and Greater Livingston that it was a golden opportunity for homeowners to shuck the city life and move to the river," said Nel Martin.

Additionally, Katrina victims from the Greater New Orleans upscale neighborhoods, as well as a number from the damaged western Gulf Coast areas, feel especially blessed to have



Brothers Glen and Dale Martin look over the list of lots remaining in their WaterFront East development.

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Dale Martin

co-owner, Blind River Properties

found an oasis here in such a peaceful and serene environment after what they've been through. They can still live on the water, seemingly without the direct threat of such a storm, yet they can remain fairly close to their home towns.

The first phase, WaterFront West, includes 40' cottage lots, as well as 80' and 100' residential home sites. WF West is already completely sold and approximately 85% built out.

WaterFront East not only moves up the canal, it moves upscale. Here, you'll find 50', 75' and 80' lots and some fabulous estates. Though WF West has all the amenities expected in exclusive developments, WF East has more of them.

WF East is gated and not just any punch-in-a-code-at-the-callbox gated; vehicles have bar-coded access so residents drive through with total safety and no inconvenience. WF East also has decorative outdoor lighting and did I mention the helicopter pad for commuting CEOs?

Moving on up the street, the cream rises to the top – The WaterFront Sanctuary.

There's no doubt, residents are flocking to Maurepas from all over Livingston but they're also coming from Ascension, Tangipahoa and St. Tammany, as well as GBR and GNO – all wanting to be an integral part of our parish waterways and they are, apparently, quite willing to pay well for it.

A lot in WF Sanctuary starts at \$222,000 and some go as high as \$300,000; however, buyers get a lot of bang for their big buck. This does include the full, usable bulkheading of a large lot and large double boathouse for two of those 40' yachts, which would cost a large chunk of change to build out of your own pocket. Still, you have yet to build the restricted home.

But life in the Sanctuary is good – and private – and grand - and serene. Each lot has 170' on the water and includes on both sides 35', 70' if you include your neighbor's, of protected trees, with natural rises of earth and berms. You cannot see your neighbor on either side and there is a heavily wooded conservation area across the street. This is more like Livingston Parish, pre-development, that, admittedly, some

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Nel Martin

real estate broker, WaterFront Realty



Nel Martin checks real estate listings in her WaterFront Realty office.

of us miss, and you have sunrise and sunset views on a beautiful waterway.

In the Sanctuary, homeowners can place pools, spas, guesthouses, playhouses, detached living rooms; whatever lifestyle signature defines them as long as it maintains the architectural style of the home. One home under construction has an indoor swimming pool.

Blind River Properties also has a number of campsites for sale on Blind River, each 3 acres with 300' of water frontage. They have electricity, but no sewer or bulkhead, are only accessible by boat and start at \$18,000.

If you add the number of lots just in The WaterFront, figure two people per household, and add half as many again for children, you have an extremely conservative estimate of over a 1000 new residents in only a six-mile stretch. That doesn't include all the new folks in the many other developments growing on the waterways, those across the canal east and west, or take into consideration the new condominium development just begun behind the WaterFront Marketplace. Maurepas will never be a sleepy hamlet again and Livingston and Ascension

Parishes face many infrastructure and educational issues due to this “overnight” tripling in population. However, the new businesses opening in The WaterFront Marketplace are loving it.

Just after turning onto Homeport Drive, the Marketplace at the WaterFront is a row of establishments leading to Kevin's Restaurant at the bridge. Maurepas is getting or has already gotten not only a major real estate company, but a mortgage broker/lender, a bistro, a physical therapy and wellness center, a fitness center and soon, a wine and gift shop, all on the water. What's next, one wonders?

The latest facelift is the beginning construction on Dockside at the WaterFront, an elevator-ready, townhome condominium development, each being 1,944 sq. ft. with its own 38' boat slip, 7' bulkhead, waterside deck with lighting, water and electrical, screened porch at dockside level and a price starting at \$295,000.

Homeport Drive may not be literally paved with gold but any clouds that may gather over the Martin brothers definitely have silver linings. They're not doing badly for a couple of Methodist preacher kids from Acy.



The Amite River Diversion Canal provides access to Lake Maurepas, Blind River and Lake Ponchartrain.