LOUISIANA INSPIRED: After welcoming refugees, Slidell real estate agent joined Ukraine's army **5D**

FAITH: Sister Helen Prejean continues her work — and her writing **4D**



LIVING



Jan Risher

Apparently, I needed a $10 flyswatter

I have bought more things in the last 11 months than I have in the last 11 years. I am not happy about that claim, but it's true.

The purchases — from a longer chain pull for a ceiling fan to an oven, refrigerator, sofa and bed — have been necessary because of our house fire in August 2025. Shopping in the wake of a fire is largely utilitarian: light fixtures, socks, rug pads, a can of spray starch, all the furniture, doors, latches, knobs, tile, sinks, flanges.

I didn't even know what a flange was, but I do know that the list goes on and on.

Whatever joy I once derived from shopping is long gone. (Except for purses. I still enjoy my quest for the perfect purse.)

All that said, there is one item that arrived last week that has me rejoicing — a flyswatter.

I had forgotten how satisfying it is to own something that has the sole purpose of smacking a fly. For reasons not fully understood, flyswatters have been missing from our lives for years — and I'm so happy I have one again.

Flyswatters played a much larger role in my childhood than they have in recent decades. I'm not exactly sure what happened to them. Where did they go? What happened to the flyswatter, a word that rhymes so perfectly with ice water — thank you, Lyle Lovett?

They used to be everywhere, but my family hasn't owned one for years.

Until last week.

That absence doesn't make a lot of sense since flyswatters are quite effective at the task at hand, and flies are very much still around.

Maybe because I've spent a lot of time at a construction site lately, I've noticed the glaring hole in life more. Maybe it's because air conditioning works so much better now than it did when I was a kid. Maybe more windows have screens.

My quest to learn more about the decline of flyswatters led me to Iza van Riemsdijk, a Dutch internal medicine and nephrology specialist who owns more than 3,300 of them. Her collection of very ordinary and very exceptional swats from all over the globe has been turned into a museum display in multiple countries.

She launched her collection in 1989 in Japan when she spotted a bow tie-shaped pink swatter with tweezers in the handle for picking up dead flies.

Riemsdijk's internet footprint is a strange one. Along with information about interesting and mundane swatters, her website includes scholarly papers with titles like

➤ See **FLYSWATTER,** page **11D**



Pianist River Eckert at his home studio in New Orleans on Aug. 3

STAFF PHOTOS BY CHRIS GRANGER

RIVER RISING



Is 16-year-old River Eckert the next great piano player from New Orleans?

BY KEITH SPERA
Staff writer

River Eckert will never delete the Instagram message he received as a Willow School eighth grader on Oct. 27, 2023.

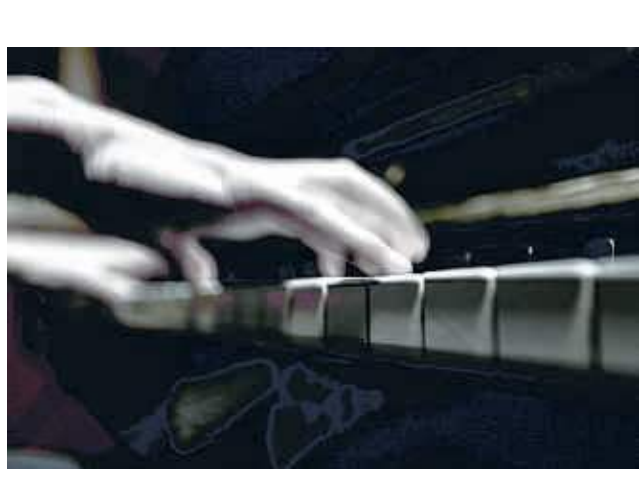
It read, "Hey River. You sound great. I have a question for your mom and dad."



A fleur-de-lis necklace around the neck of pianist River Eckert

The sender? Harry Connick Jr.

The star of stage and screen had watched online videos of the then-13-year-old Eckert playing New Orleans-style piano — think Professor Longhair, James Booker, Fats Domino, Allen Toussaint, Dr. John, Art Neville, etc. — with the fluency and feel of a much older musician.



River Eckert plays on a piano in his home studio in New Orleans. By 3 years old, Eckert was plunking away at keys.

As a former piano prodigy himself who'd been tutored by troubled genius James Booker, Connick was curious. Who was this new kid and how had he learned to play like that?

Now 16, River Eckert has burst onto

➤ See **RIVER ECKERT,** page **10D**

IN SEARCH OF NEW ORLEANS' PAILET LAND

Century-old enclave influenced later Black settlements

Pailet Land is at the far center right of this 1920s aerial photo, with the Fairgrounds and Bayou St. John at left.

PROVIDED PHOTO FROM THE HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION



BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA
Contributing writer

Richard Campanella's GEOGRAPHIES OF NEW ORLEANS

Voscoville. Walkertown. Oakdale. Soxahaus. Freetown. The Cut. Amesville. Harlem. Sugar Hill. Tunisburg. Zion City.

These and other neighborhood nicknames have histories as fluid as their geographies. They often arise in marginalized spaces, particularly in the "back of town," and may connote pride, endearment or disparagement. Vernacular toponyms are culturally meaningful.

Some, like Freetown, Soxahaus and Amesville, have disappeared from the dialect. Others such as Voscoville, Walkertown, Harlem, Sugar Hill, Tunisburg and Zion City have been revived, often with signage and civic associations. Still others, such as The Cut in the 7th Ward, serve as insider lingo.

And then there is the enigmatic Pailet Land — alternately Pailetland, Pailet Lane, Paillet Lane,

➤ See **GEOGRAPHIES,** page **11D**

FLYSWATTER

Continued from page 1D

"Steroid-Withdrawal at 3 Days After Renal Transplantation with Anti-IL-2 Receptor (alpha) Therapy: A Prospective, Randomized, Multicenter Study."

I have a feeling she and I could be friends. I do love a person willing to be dedicated to varied interests.

Apparently, humans have been annoyed by flies for a very long time. Three thousand years ago, Egyptians may have used ceremonial fly whisks made from ox tails or horsehair. One, made of ostrich feathers, was even found in Tutankhamen's tomb.

In 1900, Robert R. Montgomery patented a contraption called a "fly-killer." Fortunately, the name got better.

A few decades later, according to a 1948 account in The New Yorker, Kansas health official Dr. Samuel Crumbine was at a Topeka softball game when he heard the crowd chanting, "Swat the ball."



STAFF PHOTO BY JAN RISHER

A new flyswatter

He began urging Kansans to "swat the fly," and, in the spirit of the game, a schoolteacher named Frank H. Rose created a "fly bat" by attaching a piece of screen to a yardstick.

Crumbine eventually named the device the "flyswatter."

For decades, flyswatters were standard household equipment. Then came air conditioning, better window screens and bug zappers, which killed insects without requiring anyone to get up from the couch. Bug zappers had their own problem, of course: They killed indiscriminately, good bugs along with the pests.

But I'm still not sure what happened to the flyswatter. At some point, my family simply stopped having one. There was no great decision. No moment when we announced that we were a flyswatter-free household.

This summer, I decided the time had come to bring back the old technology.

Finding a flyswatter to purchase wasn't as easy as it used to be. Eventually, I found a $10 leather number that, I must say, is incredibly effective.

Turns out purses aren't the only thing I can still get excited about purchasing.

Apparently, a flyswatter will do it too.

I swung it at a fly on the kitchen counter last night.

I missed.

I didn't care.

Email Jan Risher at jan.risher@theadvocate.com.



PHOTO BY ERIKA GOLDRING / PROVIDED BY JAKE ECKERT

River Eckert, left, smileswith Harry Connick Jr. at the start of the 2026 Orpheus parade in New Orleans.

RIVER ECKERT

Continued from page 10D

School vs. schedule

For all his youthful energy, River has not accepted every offer. He declined an invitation to be an "American Idol" contestant.

The televised singing competition "may be, for many young people, their big chance," Jake said. "That's not the world we live in. This is a steep, long, emotional climb if you want to stay in the game."

For River, the decision came down to, "Do I want to be known as 'River Eckert' or 'River Eckert from American Idol'"?

He recently signed with Mint Talent Group, the booking agency that represents several prominent New Orleans acts. He'll occasionally miss school for out-of-town gigs. In January, he'll spend a week aboard the Big Easy Cruise alongside Samantha Fish, Galactic, Jon Cleary and John Boutte.

His parents are trying to balance his schooling and tour schedule in such a way that keeps his options open.

"You don't want to deprive anybody of any opportunities academically, career-wise, financially," Jake said. "We're looking at the road signs to point us in the most positive direction.

"Music is a long road — you don't figure it out in two years, or three or four or five or 50 years. But you can see the signs of somebody that has natural abilities from a very young age. What they do with them, that's up to them."

Jake knows the hazards of the music business as well as anybody.



PROVIDED PHOTO BY JAKE ECKERT

River Eckert, center, with Troy 'Trombone Shorty' Andrews, left, and a costumed Jon Batiste outside the Blues Tent during the 2026 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

"I'm not going to tell you what to do, but I'll tell you what not to do. I have a Ph.D. in what not to do. River has watched all that. He was there. That's the most organic way of learning."

What River knows for certain is that the stage is his happy place.

While traveling in France, he thought about how he'd never been so far from home. "Looking forward to more of those trips is something that will keep me going."

At 16, he's full of ideas. Maybe he'll record a traditional rhythm & blues album, or a Duke Ellington-style album, or a Dumpstaphunk-inspired funk album, or a solo piano album.

"I have all these creative avenues that I want to run down but I can only run down so many at once.

"Over time, I'll touch them all."

Email Keith Spera at kspera@theadvocate.com.

GEOGRAPHIES

Continued from page 1D

Pailetville, Pailletville or Pilotland.

Pailet Land arose amid the changing geography of early-1900s New Orleans. The recently installed drainage system had dewatered the backswamp, creating new living space for the city's growing population of 340,000 residents. Racial deed covenants, however, restricted most new subdivisions in places like Gentilly and Lakeview to White families, despite that over a quarter of the population comprised Black families, many of whom were eager for new housing.

Elias Pailet saw an opportunity in this mismatch of supply and demand. The son of Russian immigrants who ran a business on Dryades Street, Pailet steered his savings into real estate, specializing in "buying outlying tracts and erecting small homes for workers, white and black," according to a later Times-Picayune article.

Around 1910, Pailet found a sizeable tract just lakeside of Gentilly Road (now Boulevard), a topographic ridge recently developed into the fashionable Whites-only subdivision of Gentilly Terrace. Pailet's adjacent tract had two drawbacks: it lay across the Southern Railroad tracks, and it once hosted a natural tributary of Bayou St. John, now reconfigured into the Florida Avenue Drainage Canal.

These two nuisances had the effect of reducing land costs, but they also meant the houses would be more affordable. In 1912, Pailet had a surveyor lay streets and blocks with parcels nearly twice as large as those in the inner city. Next, contractors erected cottages and shotgun houses on either side of Paris Avenue from Pleasure Street eventually up to Caton Street, and westward toward St. Bernard Avenue.

Lacking a formal name, the neighborhood came to be known as Pailet Land, reflecting the local practice of naming subdivisions after their owners or developers.

The sizeable parcels gave Black and other working-class urban families a new sort of residential experience, with houses set back from quiet streets and surrounded by lawns. But hardly was Pailet Land like the California-style suburbia of Gentilly Terrace, a mile and a half to the east. Nor was Pailet Land much like the Pailet-owned parcels fronting 1900-2300 Gentilly Boulevard, where pricier houses were constructed.

In 1935, Times-Picayune columnist Maud O'Bryan explained that "Pailetville (or Land) is … on the back-of-town side [of] Gentilly Road," bounded by "the Southern railroad, Bayou St. John and some land belonging to A. Miles Pratt …"

Data collected by the Work Projects Administration in 1939 show most lots by the bayou remained empty; those 14 blocks closest to Gentilly Road were 70-100% White; and those 22 blocks in the the heart of Pailet Land were 100% Black in the section closer to St. Bernard Avenue, and racially integrated closer to Paris Avenue. There were no racial deed covenants then.

By 1940, the Housing Authority of New Orleans had expropriated part of Pailet Land to become the St. Bernard Avenue Housing Projects. Unlike Elias Pailet's development, these federally subsidized apartments were designated Black-only, just as the St. Thomas and Iberville projects were designated White-only.

Around that time, Pailet Land earned a place in the city's literary canon when writers Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer and Robert Tallant recorded its local folkways in their widely read book "Gumbo Ya-Ya."

Despite being corrected by locals, the authors wrote of Pailet Lane rather than Pailet Land, understanding that the "prepossessing thoroughfare" of Paris Avenue formed the eponymous lane. "The houses here are small," they wrote, "and many of them are quite neat, some are even new," though "the weeds are as high as your heady and the sidewalk is only occasionally paved."

Off Paris Avenue, conditions were downright rustic, with "unpainted shacks" among gardens and cow pastures, "constructed of scrap wood, pieces of tin, [and] discarded advertising signboards."

In terms of businesses, Pailet Land had a couple of Italian-owned groceries, pool rooms and barrooms, a beauty parlor and the Brignac Canning Company at 1510 Pleasure St., which regularly advertised for "color women" to clean shrimp and crabs. Pailet Land was also home to St. Raymond Catholic Church, the Fairview and Asia Baptist churches and the Nelson School.

Given their interest in folk tales, Saxon and his co-authors tended to exoticize Pailet Land with stories of voodoo and stereotypes written in a "'Gombo' accent." Nevertheless, a modern reader comes away with a general sense of what Pailet Land was like nearly a century ago.

In this regard, Pailet Land is historically significant because it was the first sizeable, lasting Black settlement lakeside of the Gentilly Ridge. Others followed when Dillard University opened nearby in 1931, after which Black faculty and staff settled in the adjacent Voscoville (Boscoville) and Sugar Hill subdivisions. By 1940, three other tiny Black enclaves had formed in Gentilly closer to Lake Pontchartrain. By contrast, none existed in Lakeview, on the other side of City Park.

Being closer to the predominantly Black Creole 7th Ward, Pailet Land and subsequent outlying African American settlements had the effect of steering future generations of Black families eastward in their lakeward residential shift. That trajectory involved the opening of Pontchartrain Park in 1955 and gained momentum during and after the Civil Rights Movement.

By century's end, Gentilly ranked as one of the most racially integrated sections of the city, and Black settlement progressed further into New Orleans East.

Pailet Land by this time came to be dominated by the elevated Interstate 610, built to utilize the railroad right-of-way. Traffic noise and vehicle speed changed the peaceful character of the neighborhood. When the City Planning Commission released its first map of "official" city neighborhoods in 1973, it identified this area not as Pailet Land but as St. Bernard, for the housing project. The vernacular toponym and its phonetic variations, including Pellet Land and Pilot Land, faded from citywide discourse — but not from local memory.

A generation later, Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters swamped the area. Among the many losses was St. Raymond's Church, a Pailet Land institution since 1925. The congregation eventually merged with a neighboring parish to become today's St. Raymond & St. Leo the Great Catholic Church, on 2916 Paris Ave.

About 15 years ago, a local civic association revived their neighborhood's historical name, spelled Pilotland, and with the help of the Gentilly Development Corporation and Dillard University, put the century-old nickname back in circulation.

Today, a "Welcome to Pilotland" sign greets those coming up St. Bernard Avenue from Sere Street, steps from historic Asia Baptist Church, a neighborhood institution since 1923.

Pailet Land is also remembered in Dave "Fat Man" Williams' "Way Back o' Town Blues," whose lyrics go:

"Well they call these the blues
The way back o' town blues
Way back in Boscoville, Paillet Lane
Gert Town, Lovers Lane."

Richard Campanella, a geographer with the Tulane School of Architecture and Built Environment, is the author of "Draining New Orleans;" "Crossroads, Cutoffs, and Confluences;" "Bienville's Dilemma;" and other books from LSU Press. He may be reached at http://richcampanella.com, rcampane@tulane.edu, or @nolacampanella on X.