

# Kenner Progress Kenner Proud



## City of Kenner - Mayor's Report

# 2021





## Ben Zahn: Mayor's Report for 2021

With the continuing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic during the first half of 2021 and the strongest hurricane ever to hit our area in late August, the past year presented challenges no other administration in Kenner has faced. But a great team – from the executive staff, directors and city employees, to the Fire Department, Police Department, City Council and our friends in Jefferson Parish and in the state legislature - allowed us to provide critical services to residents throughout the year with no gaps. We also made tremendous strides in the very important area of economic development.

This is my annual report updating residents on the past year in Kenner.

### Economic Development: From the River to the Lake

The Economic Development Department secured a state grant to fully pay for a study by TSW Consultants of Atlanta of both the Rivertown area and The Esplanade mall site to make recommendations on future uses for both.

The recommendations for **Rivertown** included multi-story, multi-family units overlooking the river levee.

That study highlighted the economic development potential in Rivertown, something that has been talked about by prior administrations but has remained untapped since Rivertown first opened.

We are excited to announce that will be changing very soon.

The Rivertown study attracted the attention of Kenner resident and businessman Ronnie Mains, who is working with local investors to create a Rivertown Hub development to transform Rivertown into a dining, entertainment and lifestyle destination location for locals and tourists.



He is working with Port Orleans Brewing Co. president Don Noel. Plans for the Rivertown Hub include a Port Orleans brew house, the first in the parish, that includes a rooftop bar and a breathtaking view of the Mississippi River. The development will retain and enhance the current popular attractions, including Heritage Park, the Kenner Planetarium and the Theaters for the Performing Arts.

More details on this exciting development are expected very soon.

At **The Esplanade mall**, one of the TSW recommendations calls for a City Center with a mix of housing, commercial and retail space, a popular trend around the country as fewer and fewer malls have managed to survive changing business conditions and online shopping competition.

In **Laketown**, a June press conference with Atlantis Gaming Corporation provided details on an exciting \$450



million lakefront development proposal and included NFL Hall of Famer Warren Moon and four-time world boxing champion Roy Jones Jr., both investors in the project.

The Atlantis proposal includes upscale condominiums with world-class amenities, waterfront dining, a theater, outdoor stage, shops, attractions and more.



### Treasure Chest on the Move

The Treasure Chest is expected to announce a move to a land-based casino in early January 2022, a \$90 million investment that will have a huge impact on Kenner tourism and benefit the Police Department, City Council districts, capital projects and economic development. During the year, the Treasure Chest continued to demonstrate its commitment to our solid community partnership by giving back – something that owner Boyd Gaming has made a priority since the Treasure Chest opened in 1994 – with a \$50,000 donation to the Kenner Food Bank.



### New Business

There were 182 new business licenses for the year, along with 2,403 license renewals for existing businesses. Also, during the year, we held 28 ribbon cuttings, which included 4 business expansions.

Nearly all of those ribbon cuttings were held during a six month period early in the year, but we have been contacted by a number of new businesses eager to schedule a ribbon cutting, and we held two more in December and have many more scheduled for the first few months of this year.

### Culture and Tourism

Despite a pandemic and hurricane, we had more than 371,000 room nights for the first 8 months of the year, about 65 percent occupancy. The outlook is bright for 2022, with the National Bikers Roundup booking 1,412 room nights for next August.



I'd also like to congratulate Carolyn Barrett and the Visit Kenner team for winning ConventionSouth Reader's Choice Award for the 4th time.

### Voters Renew Kenner Millages

Millage renewals for the Fire Department and garbage and sewer service were overwhelmingly approved on April 24 by voters. The fire millage was approved by 80 percent of voters; the sewer millage by 77 percent of voters and the garbage millage by 75 percent of voters. We appreciate that impressive vote of confidence.

### Infrastructure – Duncan Canal and I-10 Flyover Projects

**Duncan Canal:** Before Hurricane Ida hit, my administration had successfully worked with the state and contractor, Hard Rock Construction, to get this \$13.5 million project to replace the two timber bridges at the Duncan Canal and add drainage and pedestrian improvements along with beautification finished by the end of 2021.

However, Ida affected construction projects

throughout the region, and Duncan Canal was no exception. Work is about 75 percent finished, and should be completed by March of 2022.

**I-10 Flyover Project:** Work continued throughout the year on this \$125 million DOTD project to connect a flyover from Loyola Drive to the airport. The estimated completion is March 2023.

## Operations – Boat Launch Dredging and QAlert Service

**Williams Boulevard Boat Launch Dredging:** We worked with state officials, a city environmental contractor as well as the Army Corps of Engineers and the East Jefferson Levee District for an emergency permit.

We purchased the dredging equipment and trained Kenner crews to perform the work in-house to save on this and future dredging projects. A 45-foot-wide channel was dredged to give first responders and boaters a clear and safer navigation channel to access the lake and white marking poles were put in place to clearly mark the location of the newly dredged channel.



Future plans include building a rock jetty so that the entire boat launch area can be completely dredged.

**QAlert Citizen Service Request System:** This new system went online in February and allows residents to make service requests online and then to follow up those requests until the projects are completed. The system works with the Field Services, Parkways, General Services, Wastewater and Code Enforcement departments. The QAlert website can be found at: <https://kennerla.qscend.com/311>



## Inclusionary Park

Anthony's Missing Pieces Playground in Miguez Park in District 4 is an inclusionary playground, 1 of just 11 in the country.



Inclusionary parks are designed for children with physical, intellectual, neurological or psychological disabilities, although they welcome all kids. This has been a dream for some time for Brad and Arita Bohannon, whose godson, Anthony, was born on the spectrum.

I was personally honored, along with every member of the City Council, to be able to help Brad and Arita reach their goal of raising more than \$600,000 to make this park a reality.

District 4 Councilman George Branigan deserves special thanks for his role in helping Brad and Arita, and I was happy to work with George to find the best spot in the city for this very special playground. Thanks also go to State Rep. Joe Stagni and many of the Bohannans' family and friends.

## Innovative Recreation Department Programs In Aftermath Of Hurricane Ida

All but one of our gyms was severely damaged and the areas surrounding our fields also were hit hard by Ida. However, we took advantage of Woodlake Gym to hold a variety of programs including Martial arts, tumbling and painting, and the big field at Greenlawn was able to host a very popular kickball rec league.

We also came up with creative ideas to offer new programming. That included partnering with Coconut Beach to host beach volleyball in the spring and with First Tee Greater New Orleans to offer golf.

We held the popular Breakfast with Santa and Grinchmas Pizza Party at the City Park Pavilion, annual favorites that weren't held last year because of the pandemic. Both events were sold out.

## Kenner Fire Department

Under the leadership of Fire Chief Terence Morris, the department continued to maintain its Class 1 rating. In addition, the KFD took a number of important steps to strengthen the ties with other departments throughout the region. That included training sessions with other departments in both Jefferson Parish and surrounding areas.



In addition to training, the fire chiefs – again led by Chief Morris - put out a very important message after Hurricane Ida about generator safety.

The regional approach to firefighting extended to the Fire Academy that was held during the year.



Kenner firefighters taught the academy and welcomed 9 applicants from three area departments in addition to 7 KFD applicants. Congratulations to all the new firefighters.

This regional approach to firefighting makes sense and benefits both Kenner and all departments in the area.

The fire recruits were interrupted by Hurricane Ida – much like the recruits in the Kenner Police

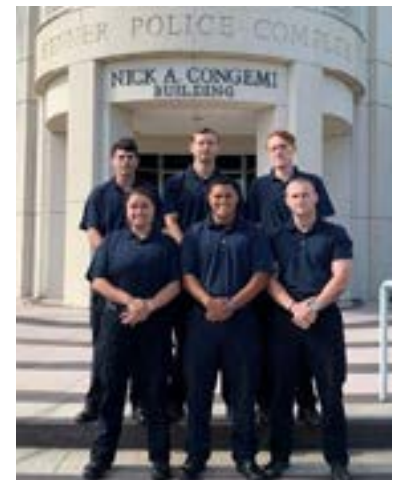


Department training academy – and eagerly served residents at food giveaways and in many other ways.

## Kenner Police Department

The Police Department's focus on crime fighting during the pandemic was successful with serious crime dropping by 7 percent in the city.

The department added four police officers and two correctional peace officers by holding a Police Training Academy during the year. Those recruits also had their class interrupted by Hurricane Ida and assisted residents



in many ways, including directing traffic at key intersections without power.

## Largest Healthcare Provider in Louisiana

Ochsner Medical Center-Kenner once again was a remarkable corporate partner during the year.

Ochsner provided vital responses both to the COVID-19 pandemic and to Hurricane Ida that included adding a new unit floor to care for the surging numbers of COVID patients and remaining open throughout Ida to offer care for residents in the city and throughout the area. In addition, Ochsner offered free COVID-19 testing and vaccines.

## Esplanade Mall Cleanup

We gave Kohan Retail Investment Group, the owner of The Esplanade mall, every opportunity to properly maintain and care for this important piece of property.

In July, we hired a private contractor to cut overgrown grass that had been a breeding grounds for rodents and other pests and to pick up trash. We will seek to recoup all public funds spent to maintain the mall property and keep Kenner residents and visitors safe.

## Annual Saints Hall of Fame Golf Tournament Returns to Kenner

The Saints Hall of Fame opened in Kenner in 1988,



and the return of this important event to the city was another sign of Kenner emerging from the effects of the pandemic and returning to normal.

### Drive-Thru Trunk or Treat at the Esplanade Mall

We continued to take advantage of the available space at the time at the Macy's building and the parking lot outside Macy's to hold centrally-located events for all residents to enjoy, such as car shows and the drive-thru Trunk or Treat in October. This safe and fun family event attracted a great turnout, with the line at one point approximately one-mile long.

### Divine Mercy Parish Seafood Fest, Car Shows, Baleada Festival

A number of events that did not take place last year because of the pandemic returned to the city as an indication of Kenner slowly but surely returning to normal.



The Divine Mercy Parish Seafood Fest attracted large crowds Oct. 8-10. The Custom Cruisers 34th Annual Sheriff Office Benefit Car and Bike Show was held in the Macy's building parking lot on Oct. 23. The New Orleans Air Coolers Buggin' Big Easy Charity VW and Porsche Car Show was also held in the Macy's parking lot. This



event was held Nov. 6 and chose Kenner for the first time and organizers have already said they are looking to a bigger

show next year. Also returning after a one-year absence was the Baleada Festival on Oct. 23 in Kenner City Park.

### Kenner Discovery Health Sciences Academy Ribbon Cutting

KDHSA is one of our incredible schools in the city. Kenner Discovery has about 2,700 total students and a waiting list of more than 2,000. The ribbon-cutting for the new campus was originally scheduled for March 2020. After delays because of the pandemic and Hurricane Ida, the ribbon cutting was held in November. Thanks to Head of School and CEO Patty Glaser, faculty and staff, kids and parents and so many people who helped to make this new school possible.

## HURRICANE IDA

**DAMAGE FROM IDA:** The Category 4 storm, which matched Laura of last year and the Last Island hurricane of 1856 as the strongest hurricanes ever to hit Louisiana, made landfall on Aug. 29, exactly 16 years after Hurricane Katrina.

City field crews spent the days in advance of the storm cleaning out drains, picking up debris and putting portable generators in place. By Monday morning, the widespread destruction from hurricane force winds from Ida was apparent throughout the city. All three buildings in the City Hall complex were a total loss, eight of the nine gyms were seriously damaged as well as the Pontchartrain Center and other city buildings. Homeowners and businesses were hit hard in every area of Kenner.

Ida knocked out power throughout the city, phone and internet service were unavailable and water pressure was

affected because of uprooted trees that ripped out water lines throughout the city and the parish.

**CLEARING STREETS:** Ida recovery throughout the city began as soon as the winds subsided as Kenner field crews, including the Municipal Emergency Response Team, or MERT, began the difficult task of removing trees and power poles from streets so that residents, emergency responders and city crews could reach all areas of Kenner.



**PROVIDING FOOD, WATER AND SUPPLIES:** The first water distribution took place just two days after the storm, with the help of CRC Global Solutions and State Reps. Joe Stagni, Jeremy LaCombe and Thomas Pressley.

On Sept. 2, Convoy of Hope began to distribute food, water and supplies outside Church of the King, which also played a very big role in helping those in need after the storm.

Convoy of Hope, a faith-based humanitarian organization worked closely with the city and Church of the King to distribute hot meals, non-perishable food, water, ice and disaster supplies.

They were here for the long haul.

For 27 days, Convoy of Hope and its dedicated team gave away supplies to more than 13,000 vehicles with the help of 559 volunteers who dedicated nearly 3,900 hours of their time to help Kenner residents in need. A total of more than 3 million pounds of resources was distributed by Convoy of Hope to Ida victims in Kenner and throughout the region. We salute this incredible organization.

The Kenner City Council, as well as the Kenner Police Department and Kenner Fire Department and volunteers from a number of city departments, played a key role in helping with the distributions. We want to thank Jefferson Parish Councilman Dominick Impastato and his staff for their assistance.

We also want to thank many other local partners, including CRC, who worked with us on distributions of food, water, ice and supplies, or held their own giveaways in different parts of the city. That includes Gulf Coast Bank for setting up a mobile ATM outside their business, Aaron Campeaux Towing for food distributions in south Kenner, Perks Coffee and Café for giving away 1,000 free meals, Risk Tree Service for donating 1,000 Smoothies, AT&T for setting up a mobile cell phone charging station, the Rotary Club of Kenner for helping to clean up Laketown and members of the Driftwood Civic Association for assisting in their neighborhood.

One measure of a caring community is how it responds in a time of need, and the aftermath of Ida proved again and again just how compassionate and caring the incredible residents and business owners in the city of Kenner are.

**ACQUIRING THE MACY'S BUILDING:** We saw the opportunity to acquire the long-vacant Macy's building at The Esplanade mall, and quickly made that a temporary city operations site. We started with a drive-thru code office to assist with storm recovery and then added more and more city departments, along with a location to hold City Council meetings to conduct city business in-person.

Macy's is now a convenient location in the center of the city where residents can meet face-to-face with the workers from city departments that had been located in the City Hall complex, and City Court is now held on a regular basis.

Also in Macy's is the City Council, Mayor's Office, Legal, Civil Service and Information Technology. We will soon



be adding more departments as part of the continuing effort to make the Macy's building a one-stop shop for city services for residents.

**COMMERCIAL BRAKE TAG SERVICE AT MACY'S:** Beginning in early December, we began providing brake tag service in the parking lot outside of the Macy's building for owners of commercial vehicles, as well as oversized vehicles and vehicles registered to disabled veterans with a DV plate.

That's in addition to the satellite stations for other vehicles that have been in operation since September 20, though service was obviously interrupted by Hurricane Ida. There are five satellite stations:

**Nola Dent Repair, 1328 Carroll St., (504) 305-2330**

**Kenner Auto, 1315 27th St., (504) 468-9441**

**Rick's Auto, 2712 Crestview St., (504) 468-9462**

**Radecker Tire, 1934 Williams Blvd., (504) 468-8094**

**Discount Zone, 4045 Williams Blvd., (504) 712-5344**

Please call ahead before visiting one of the satellite stations as hours and days of operation can occasionally change.

## HURRICANE IDA – “THIS IS OUR STORY”

Hurricane Ida affected every person in Kenner. If you are among the lucky, the devastating storm is now just a memory.

But for so many of us, Ida has left an indelible mark on our city, our homes and businesses, and in our lives.

The immediate response from Kenner employees and leaders was nothing short of heroic. And the recovery is ongoing and monumental.

The Kenner Media team was there to document the catastrophic impact of Ida beginning on the day the Category 4 storm made landfall on Aug. 29, 2021 and continuing as residents, business owners and city leaders began the long journey of recovery.

Visit the link, <https://youtu.be/xVqIApqttrs>, to watch the video, entitled “This is Our Story.”

## Conclusion

Every day we are moving closer and closer to normal as recovery from Hurricane Ida and the pandemic continues. There are many reasons to believe 2022 will be one of the most important years in the history of the city because of economic development projects we worked hard to achieve in Rivertown and Laketown, as well as the move to a land-based location for the Treasure Chest Casino, all expected to begin this year. These important projects have the potential to transform Kenner into a true destination location both for locals and tourists and are a reason for all of us to be KENNER PROUD.

**Kenner Progress**  
**Kenner Proud**