



# Gretna Chronicles



Gretna, Louisiana

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February 2021

## Valentine's Day Weddings at the Blacksmith Shop!

It's not too late for couples to marry in a beautiful setting at little cost on the most romantic day of the year. The Gretna Historical Society will host the Valentine's Day Weddings on Feb. 14 at the Blacksmith Shop.

Vow renewals are also very popular for already married couples.

The "Marrying Judge," Vernon J. Wilty III, officiates at the weddings that are scheduled between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Call in advance to Judge Wilty's office at 504.364.2760 on Mon.-Fri. between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. You will be told how to obtain a marriage license.

Although couples who seek a vow renewal will not need to obtain a license, they must contact Judge Wilty to set a time.

With the lovely patio and outdoor setting for the wedding service, the complex provides a safe environment.

Guidelines as to Covid-19 will be followed. Masks and social distancing will be required for all staff and wedding participants.



## 'Parading Historic Gretna'

The City of Gretna invites you to enjoy the special "Parading Historic Gretna" that it is hosting on Saturday, Feb. 13, from 6-8 p.m. along Huey P. Long Avenue to showcase the Old Gretna houses that are participating in the New Orleans citywide Krewe of House Floats. The Float Houses will remain decorated through Mardi Gras.

It's a drive-by, pandemic-safe event, yet a great way to enjoy the Carnival season. Drive by in the daytime or at night because some of the homes are beautifully lit.

An address list of the Old Gretna "Yaaasss, Kween" house floats can be found on [GretnaGlance.com](http://GretnaGlance.com) or on Facebook at [The Old Gretna House Floats](https://www.facebook.com/TheOldGretnaHouseFloats) or [Gretna Glance](https://www.facebook.com/GretnaGlance). You can pick up a copy of the list at most Huey P. Long Avenue businesses.

Melanie Dixon, co-captain of the krewe, hopes that locals will participate in the Old Gretna Krewe of House Floats Food Drive. Donate food at the following Old Gretna drop off locations: Creative Framing at 516 Lafayette St., Thai D Jing at 93 Fifth St. or Gold'N Creations Jewelers at 404 Huey P. Long Ave.



## The President Presiding ...

By Sylvia Schwarz, GHS President

It is the time of the year when we celebrate two holidays in the same month. Confusing? – No! The GHS is celebrating both at the same time. Party as Hearty as you can!

- The Valentine Day weddings will be held on Sunday, Feb. 14. The weddings will be held with all the Covid-19 safety guidelines in place. Judge Vernon Wilty, the marrying judge, will perform the legal ceremony and Tommy Verret will seal the vows as the blacksmith. All participants and staff will be required to wear masks. Only the allowed number of people will be permitted in the White House at any given time. Social distancing will be enforced. Unfortunately, we will not have our bagpiper and no refreshments will be served. Despite it all we will enjoy the day. ***Please help us spread the word!***
- GHS will participate in the Krewe of “Yaaasss, Kween!” House Float drive-by. Our talented members including Judy LeBlanc and Sarah Daigle have decorated the White House,

Kittie Strehle House and Train Depot. Drive by and enjoy the decorations.

- It looks like it is finally going to happen. The GHS and GEDA have approved the agreement for the Farmer’s Market/Art Walk to utilize the Depot as their office. All that awaits is to affix the signatures. The move-in date will happen as soon as this is done. We welcome them.
- We wish to thank the West Bank Rotary Club for the donation of a TV set. Mounted in the closed in patio area, it will be an additional selling point for events. We greatly appreciate their support.
- The new climate-controlled air conditioners have been installed in the Kittie Strehle House.
- The General Membership meeting will resume when the State says it is okay and safe. Until such time we ask for your patience. We miss seeing you all and cannot wait to resume our meetings.



### White House: Perfect For Events

With its beautiful renovations, the White House is the perfect choice to be rented for social events such as parties, receptions, repasts, and showers. Its amenities include an added patio, updated kitchen and large back yard for socializing. Call 504.362.3854 for availability and rates.



**Times Past** — By Stephanie Dieterich

**“Westside & the New Bridge”**

In 1901 the Stump family purchased a large parcel of land. During the first 50 years of ownership, dairy cows grazed and long staple cotton and horse beans were grown. There was even an oil well drilled on the land. The property was in an ideal location, directly in the flow of the new Westbank Expressway and GNO bridge traffic.

Dr. John F. Stumpf, a dentist, conceived, planned and spearheaded the largest and finest shopping center in Southeastern Louisiana. This offered locals plus the expected boom of new residents the opportunity to shop as never before.

Unfortunately Dr. Stumpf did not live to see the completion of his \$32,000,000 project. However, his father, Archie C. Stumpf, and his uncle, Senator Alvin T. Stumpf, carried on the family interest.

On Jan. 31, 1958, Westside Shopping Center opened with great fanfare. Jets flew overhead and a brand new 1958 Buick Riviera was given away. Throngs of people turned out, overflowing the 2,000 space parking lot onto the new expressway service road. Dr. Stumpf’s daughter, Susan Stumpf, officially dedicated the center. Nat B. Knight Jr., manager of the shopping center and master of the dedication, paid tribute to the late Dr. Stumpf for his vision, skill and labor that went into the center. Gov. Earl Long, principal speaker, congratulated the developers.

Gretna Mayor William J. White said, “Today is a great day in the City of Gretna and the entire

Westbank. Just a few years ago this area was just open fields and woods, like those you see across the expressway. Take a good look at those woods, because in a few years there will be no woods left in the City of Gretna.”

After the ceremony, crowds of people surged into the 20 stores of the new shopping center as doors were thrown open. Maison Blanche, the anchor store, was also celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Other businesses were Baker’s,

Duane’s and Thom McAn Shoe Stores, Stumpf’s Rexall Drugs, A & G Cafeteria, First National Bank, Gordon’s Jewelry, Gulf Oil Service Station, Halpern’s Fabrics, Sutton’s, F. W. Woolworth, Labiche’s, Lerner’s, Lord’s, McKenzie’s Bakery, National Food Store, Stein’s, Western Auto, Ilenberger’s Garden Center and Jefferson Insurance Agency. Shopping on the Westbank was forever changed!

By 1959, just as Mayor White had predicted, woods were cleared and multiple neighborhoods would open within the City of Gretna.

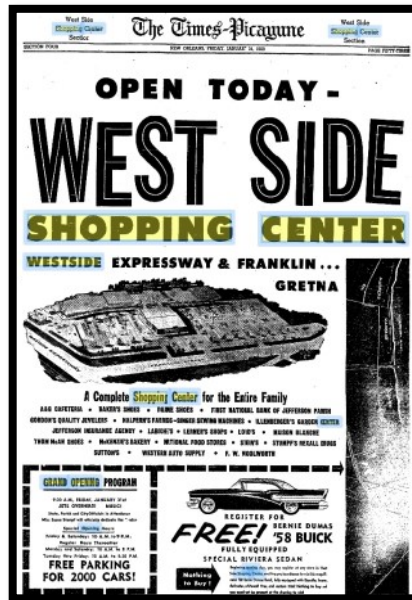
The opening of the “New Bridge” created an explosion of newcomers the Westbank had never seen before. The City of Gretna’s population of 13,813 in 1950 would almost double to its highest number ever of 24,875 by 1970.

Advertisements in 1960 for the huge new development of Terrytown mentioned Westside Shopping Center as being nearby. Oakwood Shopping Center opened eight years later in 1966 as the first air conditioned mall in the area. Lakeside Shopping Center opened in 1960, but was not enclosed or air conditioned until 1968.

Unfortunately, many of these stores are no longer around. Maison Blanche, is no longer in business, but its beloved mascot, the famous

“Mister Bingle,” is now sold at Dillard’s.

From Stumpf’s Magic Hoodoo, circa 1880s to Stumpf’s Westside Shopping Center, the Stumpf family has contributed to the city of Gretna for well over a hundred years!



*Gretna Chronicles succeeds the GHS Newsletter and the Gretna Historical Society Newsletter as the official source of news for the general membership of the Gretna Historical Society.*

## **Gretna Historical Society**

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### **Gretna Historical Society Museum Complex**

1840s Strehle Family Cottage, 1859 David Crockett  
 Volunteer Fire Co. No. 1 Fire Station (now Louisiana Fire  
 Museum), 1840s White Family Cottage

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### **ABOUT THE GHS AND HOW TO JOIN**

The Gretna Historical Society was founded in Gretna, Louisiana, in 1969, by Lloyd E. Gomez (insurance man, volunteer firefighter, and community activist), who descended from Gretna pioneers, German immigrants Claudius and Catherine Nuss Strehle. The Society's articles of incorporation were drafted by Gretna attorney Everette F. Gauthreaux and signed in his law office on October 26, 1969. Today, the GHS operates the Gretna Historical Society Museum Complex at the corner of Lafayette Street at Second. It consists of three 19th century Creole cottages, a blacksmith shop, and the Louisiana Fire Museum. The GHS also owns and maintains the caboose and train depot on Huey P. Long Avenue at Fourth Street.

There are no requirements for membership in the GHS, other than the timely payment of annual membership dues of \$20 per person. Monthly meetings are held at the St. Joseph's Auditorium at 7th and Newton Streets on the second Thursday of every month at 7:00 p.m. Guests and prospective members are always welcome to attend the meetings.

The society's newsletter, *Gretna Chronicles*, is published monthly and mailed or emailed to all members.

## **Gretna Chronicles**

is published for the members and friends of the  
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