Parish President and First Lady Were United in Marriage on Saturday, Mar. 31, 2012

Vargas Receives Life-Saver Award for Rescue

St. Bernard Parish Sheriff's Deputy Jorge Vargas happened to be the first officer to arrive at a residence on Deerfield St. in Chalmette to answer a call for medical assistance at 8:30 a.m. on Feb. 15.

University Practically Makes Arardi A College Town

When the words “college town” come to mind, people in St. Bernard usually think of cities such as Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Lafayette. Very few would make that connection with Arardi.

Now technically, the not-for-profit Upper Iowa University (UIU) is in New Orleans, but it’s located at Jackson Barracks, literally a stone’s throw away from Arardi. The infrastructure that supports the university, things like restaurants, shopping, and housing, is in St. Bernard, not Orleans.

Granted, UIU’s campus at Jackson Barracks is not a traditional university, such as the University of New Orleans or LSU, where classes run from 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., last about 18 weeks per semester, and boast student bodies in the thousands. However, if there was enough support, it could evolve into all those things. For now, UIU’s terms last eight weeks, with each class meeting one night a week.

“We’ve got everything you would need,” said Vicki Melton, director. “We have been serving the local area since 2000. We’re growing like crazy, and we’ve got places to expand.” The university offers Associate of Arts degrees, See UIU, page 12

Upper Iowa University’s administration team includes (left) Vicki Melton, director and (right) Barbara Collier, office manager
UIU

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Bachelor of Science degrees, and certificate programs. UIU is licensed in Louisiana and accredited by the Higher Learning Commission/North Central Association. “We offer 12 majors,” said Melton.

Currently Phase I of the building plan is complete, with expansion plans for a Phase II, and even a Phase III in place. Phase I includes five fully outfitted classrooms and computer laboratory. “We just moved into our newly renovated area in January,” said Melton. “We have approximately 140 enrollments.”

Many of the UIU’s students are non-traditional students, many of whom are working adults, law enforcement and military. Some of the more popular fields of study for these students are Criminal Justice, Emergency and Disaster Management, and Public Administration. “We have a very good relationship with the National Guard, Nunez Community College, and area law enforcement departments,” said Melton.

Melton spent 15 years as active duty Army, most of it as a Criminal Investigator. In 1998, she transferred into the Louisiana National Guard stationed at Jackson Barracks. In 2003, Melton applied for the job with UIU and landed it.

Like everyone else, Katrina laid waste to the university and sent Melton to Alexandria, La., where she started the Alexandria Center. But Melton believed in the Jackson Barracks campus, and felt that Jackson Barracks would be rebuilt. “We still had students here and faculty,” she said. “We were not just going to abandon them.”

Having nowhere to hold classes in the spring of 2006, a couple of students who were then members of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team got approval to use some of the space in Havens Elementary School, where SWAT was temporarily housed, to hold classes. “You could literally see SWAT members laundry hanging on a clothesline outside the classroom window. From there, we were allowed to hold class in one of the police districts for a short time until I made contact with Mrs. Cathy Rice (retired) Navy College Director, who provided UIU a small office area and space to hold some classes at their place at the old Navy Reserve Base on Poland Avenue,” said Melton.

At the time there were few students and faculty and few places to live, so Melton split her time between New Orleans and Alexandria. But as the city began to come back and Jackson Barracks was being renovated, Melton convinced her bosses to reopen the school fulltime.

In 2010, UIU got back into temporary facilities in Jackson Barracks. In the fall of that year, UIU and the National Guard entered into a collaborative effort to identify and renovate space for the university. In April 2011, UIU and Nunez Community College signed a formal articulation agreement. In January 2012, UIU moved into Phase I of its expansion plan. “It’s more than we ever had before and have room for expansion,” said Melton.

“If it weren’t for my students and faculty and all those folks who reached out to us, I wouldn’t be here,” said Melton. “And it feels great to be back.”