

# The Parish of St. Charles

December 14, 2015

## TRIBUTE

**Vernon Joseph "V.J." St. Pierre, Jr.**, was born on Jan. 7, 1945, to Vernon "Flappy" and Macklin "Maggie" St. Pierre. He takes great pride in having been born on the bayou. He is a faithful friend, devoted husband, avid sportsman, father of three, and grandfather of six.

At 128 pounds, **V.J.** excelled at high school athletics. If you grew up in St. Charles Parish, you might have seen him score a touchdown or 10. He graduated from Destrehan High School in 1964. After attending Southeastern Louisiana University for one year, he answered freedom's call and volunteered to serve his country, enlisting in the United States Marine Corps. In February 1967 he married Kathleen Madere of Reserve at St. Mary's Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Oceanside, California. There were four people present: V.J., Kathleen, and two witnesses, the priest and the janitor. The wedding reception consisted of a six-pack of Pepsi and a bag of Oreos. The honeymoon was short-lived as he bid his new bride farewell and deployed for Vietnam only four days later.

At the age of 22, **V.J.** was caught in an enemy ambush and was shot 11 times. When he saw the medivac helicopter explode, he woke up four weeks later in a hospital in Da Nang, Vietnam. He returned to the states an amputee after losing his left leg and right pinky finger. He spent 9 months in Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California, before returning to Destrehan.

Sheriff Johnny St. Amant hired **V.J.** as a radio operator and records clerk. Sheriff Ducky Sellars promoted him to a juvenile officer, then to a detective. He served on the St. Charles Parish Police Jury and in 1978 served as its president.

In 1974, he and his father started their own business out of his garage on Destrehan Drive. St. Pierre's Fabrication and Welding Inc. blossomed for 32 years in St. Charles Parish.

Over the course of the eight years as Parish President, **V.J.'s** administration invested heavily in infrastructure, parish personnel, and long-term financial sustainability.

**V.J.** focused on long-term planning during his entire term so the vision of community members can be implemented during the next several decades. In 2011, the Parish completed the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. The Recreation Master Plan, approved in 2013, will provide quality of life amenities to all members of the community once fully implemented. The Paul Maillard Revitalization Plan, approved in 2014, will serve as a guiding document for all commercial corridors throughout the Parish. Our coastlines and natural resources will be preserved through the successful implementation of the Coastal Zone Master Plan approved in 2015.

Improving the overall quality of life remained a focus of **V.J.**, resulting in many recreational projects being complete or in progress. The projects include increased recreational access to our water resources by the improvements at the Bonnet Carre' Spillway boat launches and the future boat launch on Hwy. 90 on the westbank. Additional park space has been secured in St. Rose at both the future Ed Reed Park and New Orleans Sewerage & Water Board locations. Improvements at the Ormond Park and soccer fields at Ashton Subdivision are new facilities for public use while additional investments in our levee bike paths and Rathborne, Bethune, Montz, Killona, JB Green, and Wetland Watcher Parks will allow residents throughout the Parish to enjoy the outdoors for years into the future. The sports teams organized by our Recreation Department earned forty championships during **V.J.'s** administration.

*Our seniors and veterans were always recognized and supported by V.J. As a veteran, he worked tirelessly to secure the funding and location for a memorial to all branches of the armed forces which will be located next to the Edward A. Dufresne Community Center. Annually, his staff hosted hundreds of seniors at the Annual Holiday Luncheon and veterans at the Annual Veterans Day Luncheon to honor their service to our community and nation. St. Charles remains the host parish of the River Region R.S.V.P. which results in thousands of volunteer hours to numerous organizations.*

*V.J. established the first dedicated funding source, with overwhelming voter approval of a new millage, for levees and flood protection projects on both sides of the river to keep our property dry and flood insurance rates lower. The westbank flood protection system is designed, permitted, and construction has been complete or underway for the first five phases. The Sunset Drainage District Levee is in the process of being permitted. He formalized our partnership with the Lafourche Basin Levee District and under his leadership the Parish became the governing authority of the Sunset Drainage District. The Westshore Levee, which will protect Montz, received approval by the Army Corps of Engineers and local funding is ready for construction.*

*Investing in major impactful public works projects remained a priority for V.J. from day one as Parish President. Over \$84,000,000 was invested in drainage pumping stations, increased capacity of canals and ditches, sidewalks, and miles of roads maintained on an annual schedule. Major pumping stations were built or upgraded at Cross Bayou, Willowridge, Ormond, Prescott and Sunset. The Wastewater system was improved with the upgrades done at the treatment facilities on both sides of the river. In 2015, the residents of the Parish approved the renewal of a dedicated funding source to support continued investments in the system and a reduction in sewerage rates. Annual investments in our water treatment system resulted in quality, safe drinking water and were awarded a regional taste award in 2008 and 2009.*

*V.J. directed his administration to work tirelessly to fight flood insurance rate increases and was instrumental in passing the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act through the United States Congress. Under his leadership, St. Charles Parish was selected as a pilot participant in FEMA's Levee Analysis and Mapping Procedure.*

*As a result of his eight years of leading St. Charles Parish Government, V.J. built or expanded facilities throughout the Parish. The new Edward A. Dufresne Community Center now serves as a gathering place for thousands of parish residents. New community centers in both St. Rose and Killona provide needed services to members of those communities. The St. Charles Animal Shelter is a first class facility providing adoptions and services for hundreds of pets annually. The jail formerly located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Courthouse was recently transformed into a modern office space for the entire administration. In 2013, the Council Chambers was renovated for the first time since being constructed to improve public access to their elected officials.*

*V.J. believes our most important asset in government are our employees and he continually worked to improve their financial condition, enhance their work spaces, routinely replace vehicles, provide training, and ensure funding is available to continue supporting the insurance benefits, deferred compensation employer match, and retirement.*

*As an industrial parish, St. Charles must ensure the safety of its citizens through leadership, action, and the best emergency response possible. V.J. led the construction of the state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center and purchased a mobile communications unit to provide seamless communication to our residents. After years of work, the St. Charles Parish Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness received national accreditation.*

*The Department of Finance received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Financial Offices Association of the United States every year during V.J.'s Administration. Long term financial sustainability was a major focus on V.J. and various initiatives were led by the executive team. Working with the Council, a minimum general fund balance of \$7,000,000 was established, a retirement benefits trust fund was created and funded, the unfunded retirement liability was reduced from \$43,200,000 to \$16,700,000, the user fees charged for water, wastewater, and solid waste were restructured to support the needs of those services, two surplus auctions returned \$400,000 to the Parish, and \$69,000,000 in grant funding supported the completion of 104 parish projects costing \$101,000,000.*

*V.J. served as Chairman of the South Central Planning and Development Commission and the Transportation Policy Committee of the Regional Planning Commission. For years, he served on the River Region Caucus and Louisiana Parishes Against Coastal Erosion. St. Charles Parish joined the Louisiana Super Region Rail Authority to provide alternative transportation options for our residents and businesses.*

*The economy of St. Charles Parish has grown and diversified under V.J.'s leadership. Billions have been invested and announced at the numerous industrial facilities on both sides of the river. Both the James and Dufresne Business Parks have seen millions of investment by industries ranging from ice cream distribution to international maritime logistics.*

*During times of crisis, V.J. worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of our residents. During Hurricanes Gustav, Ike, and Isaac, he quickly made decisions to protect life and property, informed the public throughout the event and during recovery, and cooperated with state and federal officials to bring our communities and businesses back as quick as possible.*

*V.J. instilled the values of transparency, fiscal integrity, and tangible progress in all of those who worked for him and the projects and programs administered under his watch.*

*V.J., we thank you for your service and we thank your wife Mrs. Kathleen and your children Ron, Kari, and Shelley for sharing you with us all during your time as Parish President. Your work will always be remembered as our citizens enjoy the resources, facilities, and programs created under your leadership. You invested your time in protecting our future and for that we are grateful. Thank you for everything, and God Bless You.*

***"PARISH OF PLENTY"**  
created in 1807 from the county of the  
"German Coast", a parish of  
unprecedented economic and social  
development, known for its  
hospitality, rural living and sporting  
opportunities... with the added  
distinction of being located  
on both sides of the  
Mighty Mississippi River.*