

## PEOPLE TO WATCH

### Our annual search for the new and notable

**BY** Katie Block & Jill Gottesman

“People to Watch” is *New Orleans Magazine*’s oldest tradition, yet it includes one of the publication’s newest twists.

As we define them, People to Watch are either little-known individuals who will be doing something new and different within the next year or people who are fairly well-known but whose careers will be expanding. Last year we added “Tops in Their Fields,” a look at people who have distinguished themselves in education, technology, hospitality and entrepreneurship.

In making our selection, we queried people with an expertise in various professional fields, including, in some cases, local journalists. The final selection was made by the editorial staff of *New Orleans Magazine*.

As always, we make no claim that those listed here are the definitive people to watch. There are thousands of people doing new and interesting things. This is just a sampling, but certainly a sample worth watching.

### **Jack Carrel**

*Director, Lesbian and Gay Community Center*

One of Jack Carrel’s goals as the new director of the Lesbian and Gay Community Center is to diffuse the notion that New Orleans actually contains a single lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community.

“We’re really a community of communities, with diverse experiences, perceptions and needs,” Carrel says. “My job is to create safe havens that address those unique needs and dreams of all our communities.”

Carrel also directs the center’s Hate Crime Project, a three-year-old program that supports hate-violence victims and their families, including a 24-hour hotline, counseling and crisis intervention.

“The communities affected by hate crimes are diverse,” Carrel says. “But we have one thing in common, and that is zero tolerance for hate.”

### **Reneé Gill Pratt**

*City Councilwoman, District B*

She’s spent the past decade in the Louisiana House of Representatives, but first-time City Councilwoman Reneé Gill Pratt is eager to bring her politics to a local level.

First on Pratt’s agenda? To clean up her district, which includes parts of Uptown, Broadmoor and Mid-City and all of the Central Business District. She has described pockets of her precinct as “looking like a Third World country” and vows to enforce existing codes to eliminate abandoned vehicles.

Pratt, who is the first woman ever to be elected in District B, says she’ll also explore new economic-

development opportunities for her district, including the construction of more midsize lofts and apartment buildings around the CBD.

### **Ryan Rilette**

*Artistic Director, Southern Repertory Theatre*

When artistic director Ryan Rilette returned to his native New Orleans last year after three years in New York City, he was determined to take a break from the theater scene. It didn't last long.

Before he knew it, he was directing "Sweet Bird of Youth" for the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival. Within weeks, Rilette was named artistic director of Southern Repertory Theatre.

Rilette says he'll build on the theater's dedication to Southern playwrights and themes by focusing on new plays, including Rebecca Gilman's "Spinning Into Butter." He also plans to resurrect the Southern New Plays Festival, during which 10 new plays will be read over two weekends.

"I want to position Southern Rep as a playwright's theater," Rilette says. "Theater today is all about the new play."

### **Steve Maklansky**

*Assistant Director for Art and Curator of Photographs, New Orleans Museum of Art*

In his tenure as the New Orleans Museum of Art's curator of photographs, Steve Maklansky has brought a progressive approach to the museum's offerings, producing some of its most provocative exhibitions, including "Last Looks: Photographs from Louisiana Hospice Patients." In his new position as the second-in-charge of museum programming, Maklansky says he won't change how he determines what is historically and artistically significant.

"Like a young artist well trained in the classics but creating innovative new works, I bring a progressive and artistic attitude toward the museum's methods and programming," says Maklansky, a 1985 Tulane University graduate. "But I plan to do it with a continuity and respect to the museum's past."

### **Mike Bush**

*Volunteer Chairman, New Orleans Regional Chamber of Commerce*

When Mike Bush took the helm of the New Orleans Regional Chamber of Commerce earlier this year, it was just the second time in the organization's history that a West Bank native occupied the top spot.

For Mississippi River Bank President and CEO Bush, it's no big deal. He says he'll take advantage of his position to push for more regional cooperation among the chamber's seven parishes.

"The business community is beginning to realize that business doesn't begin and end at their parish lines," Bush says. "They need to be looking beyond that for long-term prosperity." Bush says he will also push for development of the lower Mississippi River to grow the region's containerized cargo industry. "It's time to make some long-term decisions about our future," he says. "I'm ready to do that."

### **Geoff Coats and Edward Melendez**

*Neighborhood Activists*

If a single issue helped create the nonprofit group The Urban Conservancy in late 2001, it was the ultimately unsuccessful fight against the Wal Mart slated for construction in the Lower Garden District.

Despite the setback, co-founders Geoff Coats and Edward Melendez plan to continue their work "balancing the city's historic qualities and quality of life with the crucial need for economic growth," through ongoing research, education and advocacy.

“The quality-of-life issue is something that often gets forgotten in our city as we move forward,” Melendez says. “But quality of life is precisely why New Orleans is attractive to a diverse group of talented and creative people who bring new ideas and dollars into the city.”

### **Deuce McAllister**

*Running Back, New Orleans Saints*

It’s just been a year since 225-pound running back Deuce McAllister joined the Saints as their first-round draft pick out of the University of Mississippi. But in that year, much has happened: Ricky Williams is out and McAllister is in, ready to take the lead in the team’s running game.

“I’m just going to run and be consistent,” says McAllister of the season ahead. “I won’t always be looking for the big play, but I’ll always try to get three or four yards per carry.”

So has the locker room settled down a bit for McAllister following Williams’ departure and the Saints’ bizarre ending to its 2001 season?

“You can never tell what you’re going to get in this league,” he says. “I saw guys coming in one week and leaving the next. I’m just thankful for the time that I have here.”

### **Doug Bourgeois**

*Artist*

Raised in a devout family in the rural farm community of St. Amant, Doug Bourgeois’ oil paintings reflect the lush, green landscapes and the deep religious and cultural influences of his childhood.

Bourgeois has long been a fixture in the New Orleans art community, with regular shows at Arthur Roger Gallery. But this is a pivotal year for the artist: The Contemporary Arts Center will publish the first monograph on Bourgeois, featuring 65 color plates and 20 black-and-white illustrations in a 10-inch-square format.

Coinciding with the book’s release in early 2003 is Bourgeois’ first retrospective exhibition at the CAC. The show will later travel to four museums nationally, including in Texas and California.

### **Karen Carlson**

*Weekend News Anchor/Reporter, WWL TV/Channel 4*

Balancing the facts of a story with compassion toward its subjects is Karen Carlson’s most significant task as a news reporter for WWL TV/Channel 4.

“Finding that balance is paramount in effectively doing my job,” says Carlson, who moved to New Orleans last fall from Memphis, Tenn., to become the station’s weekend news anchor.

Carlson’s goal this year is to “tell the stories of the people of Louisiana,” using what she calls her unique brand of storytelling. But even telling stories has its own challenges.

“The news business is so interesting because it’s a job that demands 100 percent all the time,” Carlson says. “Every day I wake up and go to work with the knowledge that I have to be right about everything I talk about. That’s not easy!”

### **Dan Rajkowski**

*General Manager, New Orleans Zephyrs*

Running a baseball team isn’t just about the nine guys on the field, says Dan Rajkowski, the New Orleans Zephyrs’ new general manager. “People would be amazed at some of the things that go on with a baseball club,” says Rajkowski, who came to New Orleans from the AA Tennessee Smokies at the end of last season. “We’re dealing with media and public relations, sales and promotions, community relations, tickets, and concession operations.”

With the arrival of Rajkowski, fans can expect a big marketing push from the Zephyrs; the new GM won last year's Larry McPhail Award for excellence in promoting professional baseball.

"Baseball is a really great form of family entertainment at a reasonable price," he says. "And it's easier when you have a winning team."

### **Ashley Bowman and Drew Ramsey**

*Third-generation management, Hubig's Pies*

Hubig's Pie Co. has been churning out one of New Orleans' best-loved local foods for nearly a century: paper-wrapped, deep-fried, sugar-glazed pies in a range of flavors, from lemon to chocolate.

The recipe and operations haven't changed much since Simon Hubig founded the company all those years ago, but this year pie fans can expect something new from the Faubourg Marigny bakery: A premium pie line will launch by the end of the year, starting with a pecan pie this summer, and sugar-free and low-calorie pies will follow. Additional choices come via additions to the management with the arrival of Ashley Bowman and Drew Ramsey, the third generation to run this family-owned and -operated company.

And there are more changes on the way: Hubig's Pie lovers who have left the New Orleans area will soon be able to order their favorite pies via the Internet.

### **Roop Raj**

*Morning Anchor/Reporter, WDSU-TV/Channel 6*

Newsman Roop Raj knew reporting in New Orleans would be different than in his native Michigan, but he was unsure exactly how different until he showed up for work in mid-March.

"My first assignment was covering the annual St. Patrick's Day blowout outside Parasol's Bar in the Irish Channel," says Raj. "Need I say more?"

Voted favorite news personality in Michigan's tri-city region, Raj says he's adjusting just fine to being one of New Orleans' newest TV news personalities – green beer and all.

"People here take their newscasters very seriously," he says. "They feel as if we are an integral part of their daily lives – and they are right."

### **Jimmy Gorman**

*Artist*

From his Uptown studio, Jimmy Gorman creates metal pieces that are inherently interesting for their artful duality. He uses surprising combinations of textures and finishes. Some reflect the ancient interplay between fanciful and sinister; others rely on the modernity and simplicity of carbon and stainless steel.

But Gorman tries not to get too deep about his artistic expression. After all, his ultimate goal as an artist is simple: "I want my work in every home and/or kitchen in the world, no matter what the cost or profit, or lack thereof," he says.

Gorman might be joking, but he's on his way. A wall sculpture he designed and created was displayed in this year's Junior League Decorator's Show House, and he recently completed nearly 200 custom-designed fleur-de-lis hooks for the Clarion Hotel in New Orleans.

### **Paul McCoy, Kevin Dorr, Eric Weaver, Greg Trammell and Aaron Gainer**

*12 Stones*

The 12 Stones story is one that every air-guitar playing teen-ager dreams about: Four Northshore locals get together, form a modern-rock band, play a few gigs around town, then meet with and sign a

lucrative deal with a major record label in less than 15 months.

Add to that the April release of their debut album on Wind-up Records and an arena tour opening for Creed this summer, and it's easy to see why critics can't resist calling the band's meteoric rise a Cinderella story.

Named for a story in the Old Testament book of Joshua, 12 Stones includes vocalist Paul McCoy, guitarists Eric Weaver and Greg Trammell, bassist Kevin Dorr, and drummer Aaron Gainer.

So what's next for the young band with a spiritual tone? "A platinum album and a world tour," says McCoy, without a hint of doubt that both will certainly happen.

### **Dr. Seth Pincus**

*Director, Research Institute for Children, Children's Hospital*

Setting his sights on creating a world-class biomedical research center, Dr. Seth Pincus moved last fall from Wyoming to head Children's Hospital's new \$20 million Research Institute for Children.

An expert on infectious diseases, Pincus says he was attracted to New Orleans because of the city's growing research community. "New Orleans is becoming a center for infectious-disease work," he says. "The Research Institute will add to that existing community."

Pincus has spent the past two decades developing treatments that kill HIV-infected cells using immunotoxins and plans to continue that work in New Orleans.

"We've already turned HIV into a manageable chronic illness," Pincus says. "Now the goal is to eradicate it altogether."

### **Ron Maestri**

*Executive Director, 2003 NCAA Final Four*

It's been a decade since March Madness swept into the Louisiana Superdome, when Dean Smith's 1993 North Carolina team beat Michigan and its soon-to-be-superstar forward, Chris Webber.

The NCAA Final Four returns to the Dome in 2003, coordinated locally by the Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation's Ron Maestri, whose office oversees every detail including transportation, media access and volunteers for the big games.

Maestri anticipates the event will be much bigger than it was 10 years ago, especially in the number of spectators, which is expected to rise by more than 7,000 from 1993.

"We have been blessed in the past with exciting Final Four games in New Orleans," Maestri says. "But the thing that makes it so fun for us is showing our visitors a great time with the same hospitality that makes all our events here so special."

### **Shannon Stover**

*Executive Director, Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival*

The Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival has become one of those events by which New Orleanians mark time: If the literary festival is opening, it must be late March.

If Shannon Stover has her way, that might change slightly. In her first year as the festival's executive director, Stover wants to expand the event to occur twice annually, adding a fall program.

"It would be a wonderful way to increase our profile locally and give back to our loyal local audience," Stover says.

Stover also plans to market the festival as a cultural-tourism destination, inviting visitors to the festival's renowned panel discussions, theatrical performances, lectures and literary walking tours.

“If we can pair a visitor’s stay in New Orleans with a festival encounter, his entire experience will be enriched,” she says.

**Laura Maloney**

*Executive Director, Louisiana SPCA*

With an estimated 250,000 homeless cats and dogs on the streets of New Orleans, new SPCA Executive Director Laura Maloney’s job is never really finished. More than 1,000 strays per month end up at her Japonica Street shelter; homes are found for just 150 of them.

A passionate animal advocate and the owner of three dogs and a cat, Maloney spends much of her day on what she calls “quality-of-life” issues for animals. She hopes to one day end pet overpopulation in New Orleans, allowing her to run the shelter as a “no-kill” facility.

“We work on every possible angle to serve the homeless animals in our community,” says Maloney, who also chairs the City Council’s committee on animal-ordinance issues. “This includes increasing our appreciation of their needs and our relationships with them.”

**Jay Batt**

*City Councilman, District A*

Political rivalries are legendary in New Orleans, but none has been as openly combative as the battle between City Councilman Jay Batt and former City Councilman Scott Shea.

Batt lost to Shea by a mere 700 votes in 2000, capping one of the most heated city elections in recent history; two years later, Batt reversed the results, narrowly defeating Shea by less than 500 votes in a runoff election.

With the contentious campaigning behind him, Batt says he’ll now focus on the needs of the residents in District A: making neighborhoods safe, eliminating potholes and hiring more police officers.

**Joe Sanchez**

*Inventor, Scroll-A-Map*

Joe Sanchez hates the wind. He especially hates it while fishing on the water, his boat rocking furiously, as he tries in vain to read a fluttering map.

It was just that kind of day not long ago that the proverbial light bulb went off over Sanchez’s wind-blown head. Why not invent a device that could hold a map in place in any weather conditions? Thus, the Scroll-A Map was born.

Using his own experiences, plus input from fishing guides, boating buddies and launch operators, Sanchez configured two tube-like pieces of plastic in such a way that users can calmly view about 4 inches of their map even in the fiercest conditions.

**Angel Callazo and Dr. Steven Lesser**

*Owners, Twi Ro Pa Mills Arts and Entertainment*

The cavernous warehouse-turned-nightclub was one of the places “to see and be seen” during the 2002 Super Bowl in New Orleans. Since then, the 100,000-square-foot Twi Ro Pa Mills on Tchoupitoulas Street has maintained its status as one of the city’s hipper music venues, with its brick and stainless-steel interior, sculptural accents, art glass, and theatrical lighting.

“We founded Twi Ro Pa based on the idea that it will be a versatile and open-minded place,” says co-owner Angel Collazo (below, left). “We didn’t want it to be too corporate.”

Collazo and his business partner, emergency-medicine specialist Dr. Steven Lesser (below, right), are both visual artists who view their night job promoting music as a vehicle to their own creativity.

“We produce live-music events and tours to

support our good vibe of doing art,” Collazo says. “Promoting creative thinking ultimately increases everyone’s awareness.”

**Chris Thomas King**

*Hip-hop and blues musician/actor*

This year alone, musician and actor Chris Thomas King won three Grammy Awards, received critical acclaim for his role in “O Brother, Where Art Thou?,” worked on a mini-series with episodes directed by Spike Lee and Martin Scorsese, and performed live at the Anthony Bean Community Theater on South Carrollton Avenue.

While King admits he has a tendency to “burn the candle at both ends,” he’s not stopping now. This summer he kicks off the “Down From the Mountain” tour, based on the “O Brother” soundtrack and featuring artists such as Emmylou Harris, Patty Loveless and Ricky Skaggs, and his new CD, *Act II Dirty South Hip-Hop Blues*, is set for release this fall.

From there, King begins preparing for his first major role in a Hollywood film, this one directed by actor Billy Bob Thornton.

**Gary LaGrange**

*Executive Director, Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans*

He’s spent his career directing much smaller ports, but Gary LaGrange says he’s been dreaming about the top job at the Port of New Orleans since he began his professional life 25 years ago in the tiny port of West St. Mary in Franklin.

Since taking the New Orleans job late last year, LaGrange has been busy trying to turn the economic tide inside the port. His tactics include both traditional marketing efforts and legislative initiatives that would grant tax rebates to some port customers and diversify its revenue stream.

“We’re at an exciting juncture in the development of the Port of New Orleans,” LaGrange says. “The policies we implement today will determine how this wonderful resource benefits the city, state and region for decades to come.”

**Gerald Duhon Jr.**

*Executive Director, Young Leadership Council*

As the new executive director of New Orleans’ Young Leadership Council, Gerald Duhon Jr. is always looking for the organization’s next big project, one with the whimsical visibility of the Festival of Fins and the long lasting appeal of the Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation.

Until that big idea hits him, Duhon says he’s content to build leadership among the organization’s 1,100 members through involvement in 22 community projects scattered throughout the city.

“Our mission is to develop leaders, and we can do that in any number of ways,” Duhon says. “But we believe volunteering is one of the best ways to create New Orleans’ next generation of leaders.”

Duhon also wants to position YLC in advisory roles when big decisions are facing the city. “We are the future,” he says. “And we have a lot to contribute.”

**Donald Preau**

*Vice President-Capital Projects, Regional Transit Authority*

He’s directing the city’s most ambitious and costly transit project in years, but Donald Preau’s goals are fairly pragmatic: “To cause minimal disruption to the general public during project construction.”

Preau heads the Canal Street Streetcar Project, a \$157 million joint effort between the city of New Orleans and the Federal Transit Administration to replace the transit line that stopped running in 1964.

When the project is finished in late 2003, two dozen apple-red streetcars will run on the Canal Street neutral ground, from the Mississippi River to the cemeteries at City Park Avenue.

Next, Preau will oversee a similar streetcar project for Desire Street, scheduled to begin running in the fall of 2006.

### **Jerome “PopAgee” Johnson**

*Founder, New Orleans Music Hall of Fame Inc.*

Everyone knows New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz. But where exactly was it born?

Jerome “PopAgee” Johnson has the answer: in a one-time saloon in the 400 block of South Rampart Street, a dilapidated old building declared by the Smithsonian Institution to be of “great significance to the history of jazz.”

Johnson says he’ll restore the historical building and create a living, interactive museum dedicated to jazz – plans that have been endorsed by everyone from former Mayor Marc Morial to the New Orleans Jazz Commission.

“That building is this city’s link to the birth of jazz,” says Johnson, who already owns a fried-chicken restaurant, Mississippi Fried Chicken, on South Rampart; he acquired the newer South Rampart property earlier this year.

Johnson says he’d eventually like to create a blocks-long music and cultural district along South Rampart Street, celebrating the colorful and legendary history of the entire neighborhood.

### **Dr. Nicolás G. Bazán**

*Neuroscientist*

As director of the Louisiana State University Neuroscience Center, Dr. Nicolás G. Bazán directs research to identify critical events in strokes, epilepsy and Alzheimer’s disease.

As a start-up businessman, the Argentinean-born neuroscientist hopes soon to get FDA approval on a powerful painkiller he has developed. Human testing on the non-addictive, non-toxic drug begins this year, and Bazán hopes it will be commercially available in three years.

Wearing two hats is easy for Bazán, who has lived with his family in New Orleans for more than 20 years. In both roles he can achieve what he calls his single most important goal: To develop new medicines to help humankind.

### **Tracy Kennan, Kirah Haubrich and Adele Borie**

*Partners, 3 Ring Circus*

Viewing art doesn’t always have to happen in a gallery or a museum. So say the owners of 3 Ring Circus, which produces and promotes art shows in homes, shops, parks, restaurants and just about anywhere else they can.

“The goal is to create new markets for artists by producing their shows in alternative, non-traditional spaces,” says Kirah Haubrich, who runs the company with Adele Borie and Tracy Kennan.

Throw in some eats and drinks, and the art show can become whatever the client wants it to be: theme party, corporate meeting, trade-show event or fund-raiser, all with what Haubrich calls “artmosphere.”

But it’s not just all about the event. The 3 Ring Circus productions are also lucrative for the artist who is showing, who shares a portion of art sales with the company.