

Ferries are vital to Algiers residents - End of - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - November 17, 2011 - page F 01

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On Sunday I saw three cruise ships pass Algiers Point. The last one was at about 11 p.m. and it was playing "The Macarena" and "The Chicken Dance" at a high volume. I wanted to be disgusted, but instead I loved it, and did the chicken dance on the porch as it passed.

The river seems livelier than it has been for a long time, but one thing we may not see for much longer is the Algiers Ferry traveling back and forth from the Point to Canal Street. The Algiers, Gretna and Chalmette ferries are threatened as the Crescent City Connection tolls are scheduled to expire.

The ferries have been much maligned as consumers of a significant portion of Crescent City Connection revenue, but there have been questions about the efficiency of its management over the decades, including allegations that the ferries are inappropriate for the river crossing, and therefore frequently out of service and in need of expensive repairs.

The demise of the ferries would be the end of an era -- they've been in service since 1827 -- and it would be a step backward for the city.

Many Algerines would be forced to add their cars to the morning and evening bridge traffic, or rely on the buses. Especially this time of year, when it gets dark early, standing at the corner of Elks Place and Canal waiting for the bus has a lot less appeal than a relaxing ride home on the ferry.

Adding those cars to the rush hour is not going to be pleasant for anyone who uses the bridge. While saving 40 cents a day might sound nice, without toll booths to meter the flow, the traffic is going to snarl worse than ever at the base of the bridge. Then, once we get to the east bank, we'll have to park, again adding to the congestion.

Algiers, too, has become a lot more lively in the last few years, with Wednesdays on the Point, Holidays on the Point, the return of the bonfire and rumors of an amphitheater to be built at Algiers Point, with views of the skyline and the French Quarter. Without the ferries to connect our community to the rest of the city, to downtown workers -- whether they live on the West Bank or east -- and to tourists, those events and facilities will lose much of their luster.

Unfortunately, the ferries have become mired in a discussion of costs and revenues. With more modern ferries better designed for the task of zipping back and forth across the river, operating costs would likely plummet. They could even serve multiple destinations up and down the river.

More to the point, though, the argument that the ferry service should be dismantled unless it can generate enough revenue to cover its costs is a silly one. If we eliminated every public transportation system -- bus, train and/or ferry system -- that did not generate a profit, Amtrak's Northeast Corridor would be the only public transit left in the country. No other city buses, subways, trains or ferries would remain, because that's the only system in the country that

generates a profit.

The ferries are a treasure, and they provide a valuable link. They enable West Bank residents to get to downtown jobs, including many service industry jobs, and -- properly managed -- the ferry system could provide a greener alternative to sending thousands of cars 6.4 miles around and across a bridge just to get their drivers 0.6 miles from where they started.

To learn more about the ongoing struggle to save the ferries, visit <http://friendsoftheferry.org> and contact Friends of the Ferry founder Fay Faron, at 504.250.9110 or a2faybaby@gmail.com. To voice your support for the ferries, contact your city and state representatives: Kristin Gisleson Palmer (kgpalmer@nola.gov, 504.658.1030), Jackie Clarkson (jbclarkson@nola.gov, 504.658.1070), David Heitmeier (heitmeid@legis.state.la.us, 504.361.6356), and Jeff Arnold (504.361.6600).

It's up to all of us. If the ferries are to survive, the community must speak out. Voicing your opinion costs nothing, and -- as with elections -- everyone gets an equal voice if they simply register their concern with our elected officials.

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The Kiwanis Club of Algiers -- Morning Edition meets every Thursday morning from 7 to 8 a.m. at the Aurora Tennis and Swim Club. This morning, the guest speaker is Shane Peck, senior communications coordinator of the Huey P. Long Bridge Widening Project. Next week, the meeting will be on Wednesday rather than Thursday, due to the Thanksgiving holiday. The guest speaker will be Molly L'Hoste, Young Life Area director for the Westbank. Guests are always welcome.

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On Saturday at 10 a.m., the monthly meeting of the Algiers Historical Society will feature "Algiers' Lower Coast ... Voices from the Past." Donald Costello will play and discuss recorded interviews with his grandfather and uncle. The free event will be held at the temporary library behind the Algiers Courthouse, 225 Morgan St. For more information, please visit www.algiershistoricalsociety.org.

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On Saturday from noon to 3 p.m., former New Orleans Councilman Troy Carter is hosting the 19th annual Troy Carter Friends and Family Thanksgiving Dinner at Behrman Gymnasium, 2529 General Meyer Ave. The Thanksgiving Dinner complete with all the trimmings is free to the public. For more information, please visit www.troycarter.us or call 504.302.3682.

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SAVE THE DATE: Holidays on the Point and the Hubbell Library Christmas Tree and Holiday Gift Sale are next weekend -- Nov. 25, 26 and 27. See next Thursday's Algiers Accent column for details.

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