



# NANCY REAGAN *remembered*

FORMER FIRST LADY DIED SUNDAY AT AGE 94

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ANALYSIS

## 'Takeover' school ready to return

NOLA resumes control of Capdau

KEVIN MCGILL  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS — Twelve years ago Pierre A. Capdau Middle School became a symbol of all that was considered wrong with New Orleans' scandal-scarred school system and a test case in how to solve its problems.

Voters throughout Louisiana had, months earlier, approved a constitutional amendment allowing the state to take over schools deemed to be failing. Capdau was the first to be taken over and placed in what was then the new Recovery School District.

Now, Capdau is on the road to returning to the Orleans Parish School Board fold, albeit much later than many would have liked, and under a much different system of management.

In 2004, the state made Capdau a charter school, a public school that receives public money but run with great autonomy under a charter granted to an independent organization. The education college at the University of New Orleans began running Capdau, which now is part of the New Beginnings Schools Foundation charter organization.

Back in 2004, the idea was that the state would take over the worst of the worst schools, in New Orleans or elsewhere, turn them around, and return them to local governance in as little as five years.

But a lot has happened since 2004. Compounding the perennial poor performance of most New Orleans public schools was the realization of system corruption that included a former president of the school board who pleaded guilty in 2007 to taking more than \$100,000 in bribes.

Federal investigations would result in close to two dozen guilty pleas or convictions in connection with school system corruption. And those investigations would play out against the backdrop of destruction caused by levee failures following Hurricane Katrina.

That catastrophic flooding of 2005 set the stage for a wide-scale takeover by the RSD of all but a handful of schools from the local school board, and the eventual chartering of all those schools.

Slow but measurable improvement has resulted at many schools. So has pain and resent-

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Garbage cans are used to collect rain water from a leaking roof adjacent to the main archives vault at the LSUS Archive. The leak has caused concern over the safety of the documents stored at LSUS.

PHOTOS BY DOUGLAS COLLIER/THE TIMES

LEX TALAMO  
ALEXA.TALAMO@SHREVEPORTTIMES.COM

**R**ainwater from a recent storm drips through the roof into 10 black trashcans set out in a public area of the LSUS Archives. Nearby, a bright floral-patterned plastic table cloth drapes over the head archivist's computer to prevent damage to files from leaking stormwater.

The archives is in desperate need of a new roof — but due to a frozen budget, they're doing the best they can with what they have, said head of Special Collections Jessica Lacher-Feldman.

"We are desperate for a new roof and had been told that we had funding for a plan for the roof for this fiscal year, only to be told the day after our initial meeting that the funding was no longer there," Lacher-Feldman said.

The archives currently resides on the third floor of the new Noel Memorial Library — which makes it a prime target for water damage caused by leaks from storms, said head archivist Laura McLeMore.

"When the roof leaks, it leaks on us," McLeMore said. "Most of the leaks are in the reading and reference rooms. We are doing emergency preparedness right now for additional leaks. That is a major concern, because that information is an accumulated history of the area that can't be



Laura McLeMore

# DIRE NEED

LSUS ARCHIVES' FALLING APART AND IN NEED OF REPAIRS



Laura McLeMore checks a bound book of old Shreveport Times papers stored at the LSUS Archive. A leaking roof in a nearby office has caused concern about the safety of their archives.

replaced."

Brooke Rinaudo, LSUS director of media and public relations, said the roof started leaking some time within the last semester, and the administration is aware of the problem. Rinaudo said the university has already started working with a contractor to identify the location of the leaks. The university also has spent more than \$45,000 on the roof this past fall and has a \$1.4 million emergency capital outlay project request in with the state to replace the archives roof and also parts of the Health and Physical Education building on campus.

"We don't have money set aside to do an entire roof repair," Rinaudo said of the library's budget. "Somewhere the state had an appropriation specifically for roof repair, but with the budget cuts, that went away."

Dean of Libraries for LSU Libraries Stanley J. Wilder could not give an exact cost for a new roof, but estimated that it would cost at least \$400,000.

The mission of LSUS Archives and Special Collections is to "collect and preserve and make accessible the history of Northwest Louisiana and the Red River Region" and to provide "orderly retention and disposition of all university records," according to Library As-

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