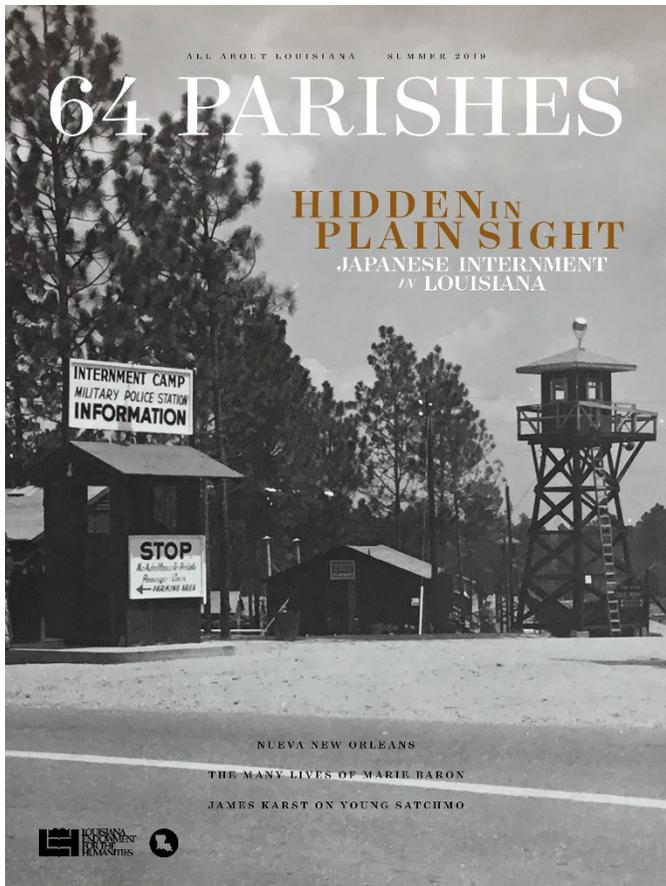


2019 Schwartz Prize Nomination

The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities is pleased to nominate the *64 Parishes* rebrand of their quarterly magazine and humanities website for the 2018 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize for Public Humanities Programs.



The summer 2019 cover of *64 Parishes* features an article on Japanese internment in central Louisiana during World War II by Louisiana State University researchers Sarah Simms and Hayley Johnson.

In September 2018, the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities consolidated two of its most prominent public-facing projects under a new brand. The magazine *Louisiana Cultural Vistas* (LCV) and the online encyclopedia *KnowLA* were combined, redesigned, and updated as a single project, [64 Parishes](#), taking its name from the sixty-four civil parishes of the state. This new brand has allowed *64 Parishes* to attract new subscribers, move toward financial self-sufficiency, present its new and existing content to Louisiana and the world in a more engaging and accessible format, and pursue new projects more confidently and effectively. Based on the extremely encouraging early responses to the rebrand, we are embarking on new initiatives building on the work already completed as part of the rebrand that will further our commitment to bring valuable humanities content to all Louisianans.



Goals for the Rebrand

The LEH produced two primary content projects: the online encyclopedia *KnowLA*, which launched in 2010, and a magazine, *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, published since 1990. Both were highly recognizable assets for the organization, and both contained strong content, but each also faced significant challenges.

KnowLA was conceptualized as a free, online encyclopedia of the state’s history and culture, complete with sound library and image repository. Topics range from short entries defining and providing context for Louisiana terms to deeper dives into thorny issues of the state’s history and society. At its peak this project employed four full-time employees at the LEH and many more freelance scholars, writers, and section editors. The project operated successfully for several years, building a strong body of content and a reputation as a reliable classroom resource and research tool. All *KnowLA* content went through peer review and a rigorous editorial process, burnishing its scholarly bona fides while also allowing the LEH to build and solidify important networks with a wide variety of scholars across a number of humanities fields. Then in 2013 the state’s funding of the LEH was withdrawn in its entirety. While the material that had been completed to that point remained online as a public resource, the CMS that held *KnowLA* content was expensive, provided by an outside vendor, and poorly optimized for social media, limiting its reach.

LCV had been printed quarterly since 1990, and while it drew skilled contributors and was among the most important of the organization’s assets for many existing stakeholders, it suffered from an outdated design that failed to draw in new readers. Not all content was made available online, and content that was online was not always available in convenient-to-use or social-media-friendly formats (much of the archival content online, for example, was available only as PDFs). In addition, *LCV* was widely perceived, not without cause, as having a predominantly New Orleans focus, with limited attention paid to the remainder of the state.

These projects needed a new brand—and a new vision. A crisper, more modern aesthetic would draw in new readers and serve as a visual marker for the planned changes to our content: maintaining our scholarly credentials while doing more to ensure that we covered stories from all populations and areas of Louisiana. A nimbler CMS would allow content to live online in a format more shareable through social media and more attractive to potential readers browsing the internet. In addition, a new brand would give the LEH’s content division an opportunity to expand its idea of what could be done to advance the humanities in Louisiana through our website and show our stakeholders that we were committed to serving and telling the stories of all sixty-four parishes.



Public Impact

Resource Accessibility

One of the most important considerations a humanities council must attend to is the availability and accessibility of the resources it produces—it is important not only to avoid the creation of an ivory tower, but also the perception of one, all while maintaining high standards for accuracy and reliability. The LEH has produced and continues to generate well-written, factually accurate content that bridges the gap between academia and the public, relying on new and established partnerships with state institutions, culture bearers, and scholars both within and outside the state. By nurturing these relationships and prioritizing compelling

photography and writing that is as engaging as it is authoritative, the LEH has built a valuable reputation as a readable, trustworthy source—the Louisiana magazine of choice for the educated layperson.

Dissemination of our content, however, was not living up to its potential under the divided brands, a big part of which was *KnowLA*'s poor social media optimization. 64Parishes.org, which uses a streamlined WordPress platform, does much better, as we can see in our improved metrics. From September 2018 to June 2019, our [Twitter](#) account gained roughly 1,000 followers and increased its impressions from approximately 65,000 to 99,000, an increase of over 50 percent. Our [Instagram](#) also gained roughly 1,000 followers, and our [Facebook](#) page over 2,000. E-newsletter subscriptions showed the most dramatic growth, rising from 208 in July of 2018 to 1,396 in August 2019—a nearly 700 percent increase. Since people increasingly access the internet through social media, if we are to engage our audience, we need to be available on these platforms; improved engagement figures indicate that our efforts are bearing fruit. (Representative examples of high-impact social media posts are included on pages 34–35.)

In addition, the visual appeal of the new brand has allowed us to pursue even higher-quality content. *LCV* was a trusted source for scholars to present their work to the public; *64 Parishes* is now also a highly desirable one, with pitches from academics, journalists, and photographers outstripping available space in the magazine by a considerable margin. We are in the difficult but enviable position of having to reject good stories and pitches simply for lack of room—Louisiana is full of stories, and we are an increasingly in-demand partner for those who wish to tell them. Our readers also recognize our high quality standards. In a recent reader survey, conducted in August 2019, more than 75 percent of respondents rated *64 Parishes'* humanities content as extremely reliable.

Readership Growth

Subscriptions have risen 15 percent year over year since the rebrand, as measured by average number of subscribers per issue. From Fall 2017 through Summer 2018, we averaged 1,586 subscribers per issue; between Fall 2018 and Summer 2019, we averaged 1,826 per issue. Our fall issue will be mailed to 2,057 subscribers, showing continued growth going into our second year as *64 Parishes*. Our recent reader survey reveals we have both print and digital readers in **all** 64 Louisiana parishes. We have also increased our paid wholesale distribution, adding ten Barnes & Noble stores in Louisiana and Texas in winter 2018 and six Books-A-Million stores in Louisiana beginning with fall 2019.

Free distribution, too, has grown. In recognition that we have a responsibility to make quality humanities content accessible to all, readers can access free *64 Parishes* content not only online at 64parishes.org, but also at free print distribution points statewide in libraries, coffee shops, community centers, visitors' centers, and museums, as well as at the four PRIME TIME Head Start Centers operated by the LEH in Ouachita Parish. We have increased the number of complimentary copies of the magazine distributed across the state by more than 20 percent since the rebrand.

New Audiences

Social media numbers, particularly through Facebook, show that we have been consistently reaching new audiences throughout the state. Key drivers for this seem to be the addition of more geographically balanced content and the ability to better disseminate existing local interest content on social media platforms.

For example, we saw our lifetime “likes” from the town of DeRidder (pop. 10,800), in Beauregard Parish in southwest Louisiana, rise by 250 percent year-over-year from last summer, due in large part to the inclusion of a short article in our Parish Spotlight series on the architecturally unusual [Beauregard Parish jail](#). Even for towns and areas that have not seen recent coverage, however, our numbers are improving, in some cases dramatically. Our average weekly reach in Morgan City (pop. 11,200), in St. Mary Parish on the central coast, was a mere 36 people in the period from July–October 2018; in April 2019, we were averaging a weekly reach of 252 people in Morgan City. In Bastrop (pop. 10,400), the seat of Morehouse Parish on the Arkansas line, we had two visitors total from July–October 2018; by May 2019, we had that up to 85 per week. Other cities we pulled for the sample, including Natchitoches (pop. 18,000), Leesville (pop. 6,100), Bossier City (pop. 68,500), and Hammond (pop. 20,500), saw percentage increases in weekly reach from 37–121 percent.

We have also increased our footprint beyond Louisiana, as recorded in our web traffic. In December 2018, Louisiana represented 49 percent of 64parishes.org users, but in June 2019 Louisiana visitors comprised 33 percent of traffic, with Texas representing 19 percent of users. Possible explanations include increased circulation of *64 Parishes* content via social media and interest from expat Louisianans or people from outside the state with an interest in Louisiana or who find our content compelling. The numbers are encouraging for future growth.

Public Recognition

Our Winter 2018 cover, the second-ever issue of *64 Parishes*, was honored with a second-place win for Best Cover at the annual [New Orleans Press Club Excellence in Journalism Awards](#), beating out multiple longer-established media brands and many with deeper subscriber bases than our own. We also competed successfully in the environmental/science reporting category, achieving a third-place win for our work in the environmental humanities.



Financial Considerations

Funding the Rebrand

The rebrand was funded by a very generous gift from Dorothy Hanna, a retired music educator from Southwest Louisiana, who through prudence and frugality had amassed a nest egg significantly larger than she foresaw needing in retirement. We are honored that Mrs.

Hanna chose the LEH as the state organization she felt most capable of creating a positive educational impact with the funds she wanted to give. Mrs. Hanna's \$100,000 gift to the LEH funded both the rebrand and a curriculum development program to be disseminated to the state's teachers through the new website.

Growth Since the Rebrand

Advertising sales have increased by 27 percent since the shift from *LCV* to *64 Parishes*. The last four issues of *LCV* (Fall 2017 through Summer 2018) averaged \$12,975 in ad sales per issue. The first four issues of *64 Parishes* averaged \$16,523, and we foresee further increases as existing and potential advertisers begin working with their 2020 media budgets. In addition, we believe (and the subsequent market research we have conducted on our subscriber pool indicates) that the new brand will make *64 Parishes* increasingly attractive to advertisers, as well as to potential funders whose grants might include the underwriting of a content component.

These moves towards financial self-sufficiency for *64 Parishes* represent a welcome step forward. While the magazine (first as *LCV* now as *64 Parishes*) has been an important part of the LEH and its mission for decades, it has also often been a relatively expensive aspect of the organization's activities. A self-sufficient humanities publication will have the freedom, flexibility, and resources to take risks and approach bold new projects to increase our reach, effectiveness, and offerings. Furthermore, a stronger financial footing allows us to more aggressively pursue the best writers, scholars, photographers, and artists as contributors, since in addition to our long-established credibility and rejuvenated aesthetic, we will also be able to pay more competitive rates.



Building on Our Progress

Geographic Inclusivity

A key part of our recommitment to telling stories from the entirety of Louisiana—and living up to our new name—was to take an honest look at our coverage: How disproportionately New Orleans-focused had we been, and what areas of the state did we most owe attention? The enthusiasm shown by readers in areas of the state outside New Orleans for content focused on their areas showed that to expand our reach within the state was not only a requirement of our mission but also a savvy business move. To this end, we undertook an internal assay of content from the past three years, assigning each piece to the parish or parishes it directly addressed. New Orleans was heavily overrepresented (nearly 50 percent of all articles dealt with New Orleans), with Cajun country and Shreveport receiving reasonable amounts of coverage relative to their populations. Other urban areas like Alexandria, Baton

Rouge, Lake Charles, and Monroe were underrepresented, and wide swathes of rural northern Louisiana had received no recent coverage at all. Of our 64 parishes, we had covered a mere 38.

Our plan moving forward from this self-assessment was to cap the number of New Orleans stories we produced while proactively working to find stories from parishes we had not recently addressed. We have made progress on this front, with stories in our Summer, Fall, and Winter 2019 issues addressing six neglected parishes, bringing our coverage to 44 of 64 parishes, with more planned for future issues. To further combat our insularity, we are developing an editorial board comprising humanists, scholars, community leaders, and public figures throughout the state, with the goal of having at least one member from each of nine regions of the state by the end of the year. We intend to ensure diversity of members beyond geography, approaching women, members of different racial and ethnic groups, members of the queer community, and people of different ages and at different stages of their academic or writing careers. We also now hold four annual *64 Parishes/LEH* events in cities around the state designed to celebrate new-issue releases and deliver related programming to communities outside of the greater New Orleans area. So far in 2019 we've held events in Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport, with a Natchitoches event featuring a discussion with anthropologists Dustin Fuqua and Hiram Gregory on folklife and foodway traditions scheduled for September 18.

In addition to these under-the-hood developments, a story about the project appeared in our own magazine, the fruit of a casual conversation with one of our regular columnists. Richard Campanella's "Geographer's Space" column is one of the most consistently popular *64 Parishes* features. A professor of geography at Tulane University and the author or co-author of ten books about geography, history, and their intersections, Campanella is one of the most prominent voices discussing the social, historical, and environmental contexts of Louisiana's physical landscapes. His work appears regularly in local and national publications, including scholarly journals and a recent feature story in the *Atlantic*. His brief for our magazine is to find stories that show how the natural and constructed geography of Louisiana affects the lives and cultures of its residents, and he delivers captivating looks at subjects such as town names vanishing from maps, armies saved by hurried infrastructure projects, and just what we mean when we say Louisiana is in "the South." Campanella wanted to use our research into the geographic spread of our coverage to look at what fair coverage of the state "should" look like. The resulting article, "Putting the '64' in '64 Parishes,'" (attached as pp. 32–33) offered valuable suggestions for our staff and served to introduce our diversification efforts to readers.

Instructor Resources

Education is a vital component of LEH programming; our award-winning PRIME TIME Family Reading Program and the Ouachita Parish Head Start programs we run using the PRIME TIME methodology reach thousands of students and families in Louisiana and beyond and serve as another important face of the organization to stakeholders and the public. *KnowLA* was another important part of our education mission, providing in-depth, high-quality, peer-reviewed information to students, researchers, and the public free of charge. Under the old, divided brands, there was no clear online home for new resources, and as mentioned above,

those resources we had constructed were suboptimally presented and consequently underused.

64 Parishes also allows us to begin extending the encyclopedia portion as time and resources allow. We do not currently have the staff or funds to restart the encyclopedia as a whole, but we have begun making resources available to complete some of the content that was left in limbo when we lost state funding in 2013. As a first step, sixteen articles about the archeology of Louisiana that were caught in the hiatus are now under editorial review, to be published within the coming months.

Grant Applications and Fulfillment

The new, polished look of *64 Parishes* makes the LEH a better partner for granting organizations. Many grants we have received or intend to apply for carry a publishing or content component. To take one example, we recently received an FSHC grant of Mellon Foundation funds under the Democracy and the Informed Citizen initiative. We used the funds to create the Democracy and Media project, a series of print/web articles and accompanying podcasts looking at the relationship between four Louisiana politicians, [Kathleen Blanco](#), [Dutch Morial](#), [Huey Long](#), and [Jim Garrison](#), and the press. The new brand and site have extended our reach. (The Huey Long podcast episode was picked up by NPR's *Throughline* podcast.) We are currently preparing the second in a series of twelve Coastal Impacts stories that will appear in *64 Parishes* thanks to a generous grant from BHP that funds the underwriting of author and image fees as well as printing costs.

With a more user-friendly website, a more compelling print presence, and an increased and growing reach and subscriber base, *64 Parishes* content is now an attractive aspect of any grant proposal. Potential grantors know that the content they sponsor or collaborate on will not only benefit from the editorial standards of *64 Parishes*, but will now also be circulated for maximum impact to growing, geographically diverse audiences.



Summary

The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities' most prominent public-facing projects, the online encyclopedia *KnowLA* and the magazine *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, were combined under a new brand, *64 Parishes*, with the goal of using an improved web presence and attractive new look to entice new readers and improve the dissemination of our humanities content across the state.

One year later, the rebranded site and magazine has seen:

- Over 5,000 new social media follows and e-newsletter subscriptions
- Over 20% rise in advertising revenue

- Over 20% growth in both free and paid distribution
- Six new parishes represented in our coverage
- Significantly improved social media and website engagement, particularly outside metropolitan areas of the state.

We have concrete plans to build on the successes associated with the rebrand, including continued expansion of our coverage, more aggressive pursuit of grants to underwrite content, and approaching more advertisers to further reinforce our improved financial footing. *64 Parishes* has been successful in its first year, and we foresee it serving as a cornerstone of our continued efforts to bring the humanities to all Louisianans.



64 PARISHES

ALL ABOUT LOUISIANA

Supporting Materials

p. 9: Our Spring 2018 cover under the old brand, illustrating the dated design concept *Louisiana Cultural Vistas* used.

p. 10: Our award-winning Winter 2018 cover.

pp. 11–16: A feature article from the final issue of *LCV* (Summer 2018), representative of the cluttered design of the old brand’s content.

pp. 17–23: An article from the forthcoming Fall 2019 issue of *64 Parishes*.

pp. 24: Sample screenshots from KnowLA.org before the rebrands.

pp. 25–31: Samples of 64parishes.org home page, navigation pages, and the online version of a feature article from our Summer 2019 issue.

pp. 32–33: “Putting the ‘64’ in *64 Parishes*,” the column Richard Campanella produced based on our research into geographic representation.

pp. 34–35: Social media captures from Facebook showing high-quality engagement with *64 Parishes* content.