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NEW ORLEANS

AND THE METRO AREA

SECTION B
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LOLIS ERIC ELIE

Jailed dad's plight not forgotten

In Monday's column, I wrote about Joe Cook, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana.

I talked about how his own life—his father's imprisonment, his family's poverty and his own battle with a life-threatening illness—helped to shape his commitment to the fight for civil rights.

One of Cook's ongoing efforts is the reform of Orleans Parish Prison. Earlier this month, Cook's organization released a lengthy court document from the National Prison Project of the ACLU Foundation regarding the treatment of pregnant women at the jail. According to the document, Criminal Sheriff Charles Foti and his staff routinely fail to provide adequate medical care for these expectant mothers — an allegation Foti's office denies.

But to understand Cook's concern about these inmates, it is not enough to know that his father went to prison in the mid-1950s for shooting a man as a result of a neighborhood feud. It's not enough to know that the shooting victim was left paralyzed below the waist.

You must also know a few things about Arkansas' Cummins Prison Farm, where Joe Cook's father was incarcerated.

That prison and the brief tenure of its reform-minded warden, Thomas Murton, were the inspiration for "Brubaker," a 1980 Robert Redford film.

At Cummins, inmates were routinely brutalized by guards and other inmates.

Not long after he arrived at Cummins, Cook's father was badly beaten.

"I remember going there. It was scary," Cook said. "I didn't have any problems with my dad being punished for the crime. He did wrong. But I did have a problem with the fact that he was brutalized."

In the late 1960s, long after the elder Cook had been released, an inmate led officials to the bodies of three men he said had been beaten and shot by prison guards.

The brutality of Cummins Prison was only part of the problem. The entire Arkansas prison system was corrupt, Cook said.

When his father was eligible for parole, a bribe had to be paid to law enforcement officials in order to ensure that the case would even be heard by the parole board.

"He was eligible anyway, but you didn't always get a hearing just because you were eligible," Cook said.

So Cook takes more than a passing interest in injustice in our prison system. He says that the conditions at Orleans Parish Prison are particularly bad.

Most recently, Foti and his staff have been implicated in the deaths of two women who died of diabetic comas in their custody.

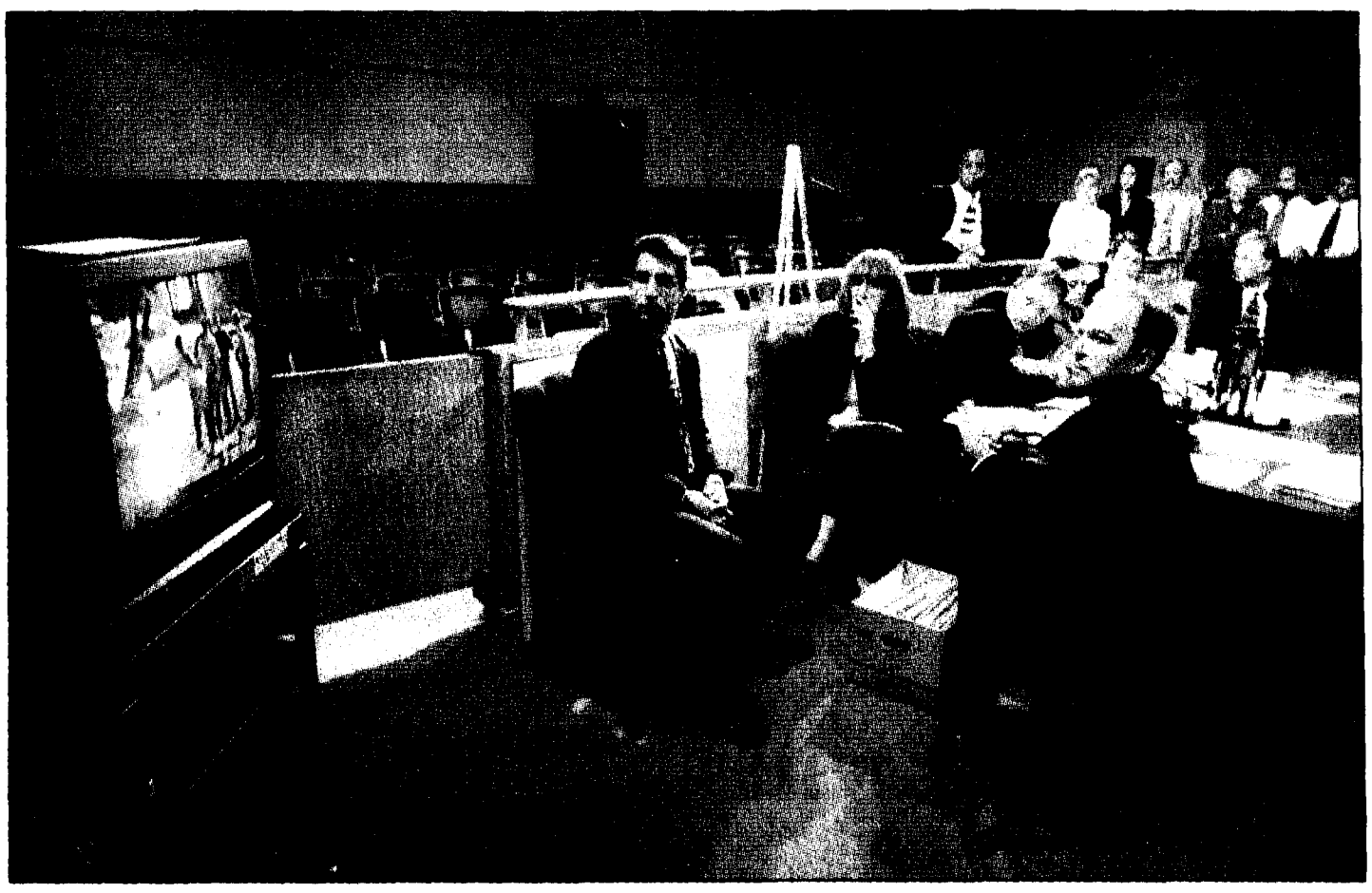
Jo Ann Johnson, 21, of Algiers, died April 6 in the custody of the Sheriff's Office after suffering a diabetic attack that sent her blood sugar to toxic levels and stopped her heart, according to the coroner's office.

Ruth Ann Milazzo, who died Nov. 13, 1996 at the age of 35, suffered a similar fate, according to a lawsuit filed by her family.

But for Cook, the deaths of these women are but two examples of many instances in which the sheriff and his staff ignore the civil rights and health concerns of inmates in their care.

"There certainly are some people who need to be locked up; don't get me wrong," Cook says. "But these people are treated as human garbage."

Alcohol board's unanimous vote kills Audubon Tavern II's license



STAFF PHOTO BY TED JACKSON

George Williamson, right, owner of Audubon Tavern II, watches along with members of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board as they view a videotape of AT II patrons outside the bar.

Neighbors, cops tell of rowdy, drunken bar patrons

By Coleman Warner and Petula Dvorak
Staff writers

Neighbors who launched a campaign to close down a popular Uptown college bar hope they'll be able to rejoice July 23, the date set Tuesday by the city's Alcoholic Beverage Control Board for the bar to lose its license.

After a seven-hour hearing, reportedly one of the longest it has ever held, the board took the rare step of voting unanimously to revoke the license of Audubon Tavern II at 6100 Magazine St.

But owner George Williamson is not yet ready to throw in the bar rag.

"I don't believe it's quite over yet," he said. "Obviously, I'm not very pleased. I'm sorry that the neighbors and I couldn't reach an agreement."

Williamson's attorney, Scott Bickford, said he will appeal the board's decision to Civil District Court and will ask for a restraining order to let the bar stay open during the appeals process.

Williamson said the board's decision will embolden neighborhood groups who are on the hunt to rid their neighborhoods of long-standing establishments.

See **AT II,** *B-2*

Ag Street landfill cleanup blasted

Critics say dirt fill isn't deep enough

By Mark Schleifstein
Staff writer

Contractors working for the Environmental Protection Agency are replacing less dirt than the federal agency recommended in parts of the Agriculture Street Landfill Superfund site, a critic of the project said this week.

The EPA had proposed removing the top 2 feet of dirt contaminated with lead, arsenic and other toxic chemicals from land around homes, apartments and other buildings atop the old New Orleans landfill, and replacing it with 2 feet of clean fill. The cleanup, under way since March, is expected to cost at least $20 million.

But after water, natural gas and cable lines broke several times as workers removed soil from around the Gordon Plaza Apartments, officials decided to replace only the top foot of soil in utility rights of way in the neighborhood, said Peggy Grandpre, president of Concerned Citizens of the Agriculture Street Landfill.

She said she was told of the change by EPA officials.

Grandpre said the reduced protection will be among the concerns she and other Press Park and Gor-

See **LANDFILL,** *B-2*

Plan for Esplanade mansion replica OK'd

But final decision rests with council

By David A. Fahrenthold
Staff writer

Opponents of the plan, who included representatives from neighborhood groups in Esplanade Ridge, Faubourg Marigny and Faubourg St. John, said they resent commercial encroachment on the famous residential street.

After a tense public hearing Tuesday afternoon, the New Orleans City Planning Commission supported but did not formally recommend Carlton Charles' plans to build a replica of the burned-down Gambino House on Esplanade Avenue and put a pharmacy inside.

The commission voted 4-2 in favor of Charles' request for a change in zoning for the site of the former mansion and adjoining properties near the corner of Esplanade and North Villere Street. But three members of the commission were not present, and the four votes were not enough to constitute an official commission action. The plans will go on to the City Council in July for a final decision.

Charles said he was "comfortable" with the outcome, which amounted to something of a victory for him because the commission's staff had recommended denying his plans. He has proposed a building that would resemble the Gambino House from the outside, housing a larger version of his current pharmacy downstairs and two apartments upstairs.

His pharmacy is next door to the site of the former mansion, which burned down in July 1997.

The acrimonious public debate that preceded the vote was punctuated by interruptions from the audience and accusations about arson and racial divisions, leaving no doubt that strong emotions exist on both sides.

Charles, who is black, brought in supporters from the neighborhood near the property, as well as representatives from local chapters of the Nation of Islam and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to speak for his proposal.

Several speakers made reference to suspicions surrounding the fire that destroyed the long-neglected house. Charles bought the property in 1991 and was in danger of having it seized by the city for "demolition by neglect" when the fire broke out. He blamed the fire on vagrants, but some neighbors suspect it was deliberately set.

"If they are going to indict this man for burning that building, indict him," Treme activist Randy Mitchell said. "Until I see this man brought out of his building and handcuffed, our community is going to support him."

Both sides tried to portray themselves as representing the community around Charles' property, where he has operated a pharmacy since the 1970s.

The debate at times took on a racial tone. At one point, white resident Michael Huye, speaking against the proposal, said, "I don't have to be a black person, Mr. Charles, to live in Treme."

Opponents of the plan, who included representatives from neighborhood groups in Esplanade Ridge, Faubourg Marigny and

See **PHARMACY,** *B-2*



Judith H. LaRosa
Chairwoman in Tulane's School of Public Health is following husband



Dr. John C. LaRosa
Tulane Medical Center chancellor is resigning

Tulane loses two officials to N.Y.

Husband-wife team off to SUNY

By John Pope
Staff writer

Dr. John C. LaRosa, Tulane University Medical Center's chancellor since 1994, resigned Tuesday to become president of the State University of New York Health Science Center at Brooklyn.

His wife, Judith H. LaRosa, will leave with him Oct. 1. She is chairwoman of the Department of Community Health Sciences in Tulane's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and director of the Tulane/Xavier National Center of Excellence in Women's Health, which she helped establish.

She does not have a job yet, and no interim successor for either LaRosa has been named.

John LaRosa, 58, was picked for the Brooklyn post Tuesday by the

See **TULANE,** *B-2*

Pupils learn science aboard a Navy ship

Practical learning a hit with students

By Mark Waller
East Jefferson bureau

Forty miles from the Mississippi River's mouth, a group of high school students stood on the Navy ship Henson's deck and dropped weighted light bulbs into the Gulf of Mexico.

Six hundred feet below the surface, the water pressure prevailed, imploding the bulbs and sending sharp popping sounds through underwater microphones to another group of students monitoring the experiment from the ship's laboratory.

"We made bombs out of light bulbs," said Greg Muscat, a rising senior at Northshore High School in Slidell. "It sounded like a firecracker."

Muscat was among 11 students and teachers who spent three days aboard the Henson, an oceanographic survey ship, to learn more about sciences that the Navy uses

See **SHIP,** *B-2*



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHN McCUSKER

The USNS Henson makes its way up the Mississippi River Tuesday, after returning from a three-day voyage with area high school students. While on board the ship, students learned about the science the Navy uses to guard its ships and vessels.