

NEWS RELEASE    
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Contact:    
Candy Rodriguez

Director of Communications    
Visit Lake Charles    
337-502-4343

Port Wonder Ribbon Cutting Marks a Major Milestone

for Lake Charles’ Lakefront

LAKE CHARLES, La. (March 20, 2025) — Today marked an exciting milestone for Lake Charles and Southwest Louisiana as community leaders, partners, and residents gathered along the lakefront to celebrate the ribbon cutting of Port Wonder , a visionary family-focused destination that will open to the public in early April 2025.

Port Wonder is more than a building; it is a dynamic symbol of progress, collaboration, and innovation. Located along North Lakeshore Drive near I-10, this iconic structure features a distinctive undulating roofline that reflects the winding waterways of Southwest Louisiana, culminating at Lake Charles. Designed by Cambridge Seven Associates of Cambridge, Massachusetts, with Lemoine Co. as the building contractor and local architect Randy Goodloe, Port Wonder is positioned to become a premier destination for families traveling the I-10 Corridor and beyond.

This multimillion-dollar public-private partnership has transformed a prime area of the lakefront between the Cypress Alligator Pond habitat and the city parking garage into a family-centric hub for education, entertainment, and exploration.

At the heart of Port Wonder are two major attractions:

**The Children’s Museum of Southwest Louisiana**

Spanning 15,000 square feet, the Children’s Museum of Southwest Louisiana is a vibrant, state-of-the-art facility designed to spark curiosity, inspire learning, and foster creativity for children of all ages. The museum features four dynamic galleries — Nature, Health, Tech, and City — each blending beloved classics with innovative, hands-on experiences.

In the Nature Gallery, children can crawl through an alligator’s nest, explore an oversized vegetable pollinator garden, and marvel at a whimsical banana spider web. The Sportsman’s Paradise section introduces young explorers to Louisiana’s rich outdoor heritage with interactive fishing and crabbing exhibits and a dynamic water cycle table that brings science to life.

The Health Gallery invites young minds to discover the human body through engaging exhibits, including the Mr. Bones cycling display and an interactive digestive maze.

In the Tech Gallery, creativity and problem-solving take center stage in the Tinker Lab, with rotating STEM activities where children can experiment with simple machines, light, air, and chemistry while learning how these concepts power local industries.

The City Gallery immerses children in a miniature world of local character, featuring interactive spaces like Kids Port, the Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Climber, and Cowboy’s Café.

For families with toddlers, the Calcasieu Crawlers space provides a safe, sensory-friendly play area, along with two private nursing rooms for mothers. Visitors can also browse the museum’s gift shop, offering Louisiana-themed toys, books, and souvenirs. The Maker’s Garage is a flexible event space for workshops and special programming, adding to the museum’s commitment to year-round educational experiences.

**LDWF Nature and Science Center**

Occupying 5,700 square feet, the LDWF Nature and Science Center is an immersive educational facility designed for families, students, and nature enthusiasts of all ages. This interactive center features over 15,000 gallons of fresh and saltwater aquariums, showcasing the biodiversity of Louisiana’s bayous, reefs, and the Gulf of Mexico.

Aquarium highlights include:

1,500-gallon Bayou Tank

300-gallon Oyster Reef Tank

6,900-gallon Cameron Jetty Tank

2,200-gallon Rig Reef Tank

2,900-gallon Touch Tank featuring stingrays

Interactive exhibits showcase key LDWF initiatives like coastal restoration, fisheries management, and the innovative Rigs to Reefs Program. Visitors can also enjoy a fun fishing game that allows children and adults to “catch” native Louisiana species virtually.

Outdoors, the site features walking trails, an ADA-compliant covered fishing pier, and connections to the existing alligator habitat along the lakefront boardwalk.

The Nature and Science Center is made possible in part by funding through the Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group (TIG), using dollars set aside to compensate the public for lost recreational use opportunities following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation (LAWFF) is a key supporting partner in bringing this educational experience to life.

Admission & Hours of Operation

Admission details will be available soon. Visitors will have the opportunity to purchase separate admission tickets for each museum or a joint ticket for access to both sides of Port Wonder — allowing for an unforgettable, full-day experience for families and visitors of all ages.

Hours of Operation:

Monday–Saturday: 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Sunday: Closed

**The Bigger Picture: A Transformative Lakefront Development**

Port Wonder is more than just a ribbon-cutting; it’s the realization of a visionary lakefront project that has been years in the making. Announced in 2018 and breaking ground in June 2021, this $30+ million investment is a testament to the power of public-private partnerships in Southwest Louisiana.

The development brings together a diverse group of stakeholders dedicated to enriching the community, including the Calcasieu Parish Public Library, Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, Calcasieu Parish Public Trust Authority, Calcasieu Parish School Board, Lake Charles Regional Airport, Port of Lake Charles, Visit Lake Charles, Ward 3 Recreation, and many more. Philanthropic contributions from individuals and businesses—including Bill and Kay Dore, Entergy, the Gehrig Family, the Junior League of Lake Charles, Lake Charles Memorial Hospital, Landlocked Aviation Services, P66, the Safety Council of Southwest Louisiana, Sasol, State Farm, United Way of Southwest Louisiana, and the Zigler Foundation—further illustrate the community-driven nature of the project.

Port Wonder’s grand opening sets the stage for a dynamic lakefront district that will continue evolving. Adding to the excitement, Crying Eagle Brewing - Lakefront is set to open this summer, offering a vibrant dining and entertainment experience. This $12 million expansion of the popular local brewery will feature a full-service restaurant with a seafood-inspired menu, a microbrewery specializing in crisp lagers, and a full bar serving craft cocktails and wine. Designed as a gathering place, the venue will include indoor and outdoor entertainment spaces, as well as a waterfront to-go station—perfect for grabbing a drink while enjoying a leisurely lakeside stroll.

With Port Wonder as the anchor and Crying Eagle Brewing - Lakefront adding a flavorful touch, the Lake Charles lakefront is poised to become a premier destination for families, visitors, and locals alike.

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**About Visit Lake Charles:**

Visit Lake Charles, the official destination marketing organization for Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana, is the only organization in Southwest Louisiana providing advocacy, promotion, and education for the tourism industry. For more information on Visit Lake Charles and things to see and do in Louisiana’s Playground, log on to www.visitlakecharles.org.