

Narrator: Davie Breaux
Interviewer: Susan Testroet-Bergeron
Transcriber: Taylor Suir

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SUSAN TESTROET BERGERON: My name is Susan Testroet- Bergeron and I am interviewing Mr. Davie Breaux about his memories and experiences concerning Louisiana, community, and wetlands. The interview is being conducted at 9:30 am on April the third. The interview is being conducted at Port Fourchon. Do you understand that portions of the tape, interview, and pictures taken during the interview may be used in a variety of publications?

DAVIE BREAUX: I sure do.

BERGERON: Ok, Thank you for speaking to me today. We are going to start by first of all having you state your name, where you're from, how your family got to coastal Louisiana, and then we will talk a little bit about business and habitat and things like that.

BREAUX: [0:49] Well, My name is Davie Breaux and I am the director of operations for the Greater Lafourche Port Commission. I've been in this job position for 16 years and prior to that I worked in the construction industry. What I do in operations here at the port is oversee construction and development of the port itself. The Greater Lafourche Port Commission owns, well, owns property as well as other land owners here. We also manage property for landowners so we are pretty much the developer of Fourchon or Port Fourchon, as we call it. Another part of

my job is also we own and operate an airport in Galiano. So, as a port commission, we not only have a sea port but also an airport that we're developing for our community. My family is, well I am originally from Cutoff, born and raised in Galiano, lived in Larose for I think about 12 years and then moved to Cutoff which is about a 5 or 6 mile stretch. But, went to school down here in South Louisiana and I actually went to college and graduated from Nicholls State University. Like I said, paid my way through school as a draftsman working for architects and engineers; learned a bit about the construction industry and then worked for 14 years for a general contractor prior to working for the Port Commissioner.

BERGERON: Very good; so if you were to sort of describe your heritage is from, where your grandparents are from, how did they get here? Tell us a little bit about your connection to South Louisiana.

BREAUX: [2:35] Without going too far back on the family tree, my grandparents, both lived here, were born and raised here in South Louisiana. One grandfather worked on a farm, actually a delta farm. He was, I guess, I'm trying to think of the word, a property manager type, took care of the cattle, and stuff on that farm and that was a leveed in, pumped out area that was used for grazing cattle and such and growing sugar cane eventually. That would be on the Breaux side of the family. And on the other side of the family, the Chouest side and my grandfather, Houston Chouest worked for Texaco for as long as I can remember. He actually retired with 30-something years working for Texaco. My father was able to get a job with Texaco when he got out of high school and he also graduated with 30 something years of working for Texaco. If I'd have worked

in the oil and gas industry, I guess I'd third generation but I chose to stay on land. I actually realized that the construction industry and the work that I have been doing in the private sector as well as in the public sector is all, has all things are connected to the oil and gas industry that they work for; the jobs that have been created, the people that we were designing homes for and building homes for in the construction industry, 90% of them were people that worked in the oil and gas industry. So even though I didn't work directly for and oil and gas company, I was working for people who worked for an oil and gas companies.

BERGERON: It's pretty interesting, we've been knowing each other for a while and every time I come out here I come out with a group of teachers and we go out and do sort of a two part thing here, we look at the industry that's here but we also look at the restoration. One of the reasons I wanted to talk to you today is because you have, to me, a very unique perspective about the connection between business and industry and conservation and restoration. So, I'd like for you to talk a little bit about, personally and businesswise, your connection to industry and restoration and conservation.

BREAUX: [5:07] I think that connectivity has a lot to do with the people in our community. We have the luxury and the benefit of living along the Bayou Lafourche Ridge between the largest estuary in the nation; that being the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary. We've all grown up enjoying those resources: hunting, fishing, crabbing, having fresh seafood whenever we wanted, depending on what season was open. So, we grew up with that and want that. You know, I guess the realization that not everyone could make a living off of the seafood industry, off of those

natural resources. The forefathers that worked on the commission as well as the present commissioners looked at the opportunities and options and some 60 years ago made the decision to tax themselves along with the communities who had to vote that in, to tax themselves to build a port. Originally the port was partial shrimping and they were looking at having docks set up for, I guess, the inshore drilling. Going back to the inshore drilling or how did that connect to our environment, our shrimpers and fishermen, those shrimpers and fishermen knew the inland waters. When oil was discovered in coastal Louisiana there was a lot of it in the wetlands. So they needed access to those wetlands. Well, they would hire the local shrimpers and fishermen to bring their goods and supplies to those drilling rigs. And that's how they migrated. They used the experience of those mariners to get their goods and services and allow them to drill. Eventually, that drilling went to Coastal Louisiana and actually offshore Louisiana and then the vessels that were being used were actually not adequate to deliver goods offshore, even though it was in shallow water, so the local community and communities' families said 'there are 4-5 generations we've been building our own shrimping vessels, we think we can build the vessel you need for Coastal Louisiana supplies and services'. And they started fabricating those vessels in their back yards along the Bayou like they would their own personal shrimping vessels. And that's how the community grew into the oil and gas industry. It still doesn't mean the community is a drilling community. The community was and still is providing many services that the oil and gas industry needs; as in vessels. Port Fourchon is actually an intermodal hub. Anything that needs to be delivered to the oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico needed a transfer point from on land or inland waters to offshore waters and Port Fourchon is used as that transfer spot. Inland barges and trucks deliver goods to Fourchon, they're then put on an offshore mode of transportation, and delivered to those rigs offshore. And not only goods, there are 12,000 people working in the

Gulf of Mexico that fly out of Fourchon by helicopter or go on crew boats to be delivered. And they work in the gulf 15 days or 30 days and they come back in and they're not strictly from our community. They are from all over the United States. It's pretty much global- the drilling industry.

BERGERON: So tell me, when y'all are building a new, and I've heard you talk about this before; you're building a new slip. What happens, not just to build the slip, but what do you guys do to sort of do more than mitigate for that growth? Explain that to us.

BREAUX: [9:22] Well, I'll give you an example: when we're planning some new development. Right now we have a 400 acre development under construction. It's called our Slip Sea Development. The slip is 700 feet wide and 7,000 feet long and we had to start 3 years prior to that our permitting. So we had to go through all the permitting phases. We use the material that we dredge from the slip to build the land up to be able to build facilities on. That's why we have to start so early. We try to have these projects 5 years prior to developing the property, in place. So we use some dredge spoils to fill the land to build facilities and nowadays in permitting you have to mitigate and our mitigation is about acre per acre. For every acre we develop we have to mitigate and rebuild an acre of marsh. The sad thing is; we do not have to go far to rebuild an acre of marsh. There's deteriorated marsh all around us. Our Commission that I work for chose to purchase 3,000 acres just north of port. They've turned that into a sanctuary but also use that area to do our mitigations. So if we're going to mitigate, we'd like to mitigate on land

we own, for one and number two, we'd like to mitigate land that will protect us in storms, from storms. And also rebuild the property around us.

BERGERON: It seems like when I come here, that it's more than just you're doing what you have to do here. It seems that it's a bigger commitment than that.

BREAUX: [11:12] I think it is. In a perfect example of that is our Maritime Forest Ridge. In the area we are mitigating on the property the Port owns we had some additional dredge spoil materials and chose to use that additional dredge spoil material to create a Maritime Forest Ridge. Everyone that was required to mitigate has been building marsh and we also were rebuilding marsh because that's what was required but we looked at this additional material and said, "You know, everybody is building marsh but the ridges are also disappearing in our coastal wetlands and no one is rebuilding them." So our past executive director came up with the idea of building a ridge. And that ridge is planned to have a plus 8 elevation, have scrub oaks, the neo-tropical birds that fly to Mexico in the winters fly back here and this is their first stop in the spring. They need a place to land and re-nourish themselves. And just marsh grass will not provide that and a ridge with small scrubby oaks will. So, that's something that wasn't required of us that we chose to do and once the idea got around there were quite a few people that came aboard to assist us with it.

BERGERON: Let's talk a little bit about personal perspective here. As a native Louisianaian, the goal of this is to talk to the rest of the nation about what's going on. Why do you think that the rest of the nation should care about Coastal Louisiana and coastal restoration?

BREAUX: [13:06] Well, Coastal Louisiana is and especially the community that we live in is situated between two of the largest estuaries in the nation, provides 20% of the nation's seafood, as well as the unique marshes and habitats that exists nowhere else. So we think it's vitally important to the nation to protect those wetlands and the coastline. The other reason is the access to this nation's energy supply. The federal government leases the major gas companies in the Gulf of Mexico. Those leases are producing 18-20% of the nation's hydrocarbons which is oil and gas consumption. And as the nation's energy demand grows, the volume is going to continue to grow. The need for the nation, if they ever want to become energy independent; the potential is here if they ever want to drill in the gulf and keep increasing our supply. But they need access points and the reason Fourchon is a very valuable commodity for the nation is it's right on the Gulf Coast. It's easy access. It actually saves money for the oil and gas industry as well as. Since it does save money for them accessing the Gulf it keeps the price in line. If they have drilling in the Gulf of Mexico but no way to access it then you would see an increase in price in trying to access it.

BERGERON: Ok, Let's talk a little bit about sort of, do you have any children?

BREAUX: I sure do.

BERGERON: How many children?

BREAUX: [15:03] I have two boys.

BERGERON: And how old are the boys?

BREAUX: 25 and 18.

BERGERON: 25 and 18. Do you ever get into discussions with them about coastal land loss and costal restoration?

BREAUX: We sure do.

BERGERON: So tell me a little bit about what they think. How do you share your ideas about that?

BREAUX: Well, Let's just say they grew up here on the bayou and enjoy fishing and I try to do activities with them in hunting and fishing and teaching them about the natural resources and what it means and how to enjoy it and how not to abuse it and overuse it. You'll probably see their photographs in many of the rodeo books because they've won a few awards catching bull reds and bull drum. They both love the outdoors and have enjoyed it in their childhood and I hope their children can enjoy the same outdoors. [16:10] A long term goal is: I grew up with it, my kids grew up enjoying the natural resources and saving Coastal Louisiana means that their children and their grandchildren will be able to enjoy those natural resources.

BERGERON: If you wanted to send a message to those yet to be born, grandchildren and great-grandchildren about what you do here for their future, what would you tell them about why you're not just the industry part but the restoration part?

BREAUX: I guess it's intertwined in what we're doing here as far as industry or as far as creating jobs in industry is giving you an opportunity to live here, if you choose, to be able to live here and making a living. Preserving, and the coastal wetland projects that we do and the restoration projects that we do protect the infrastructure of Fourchon which is about a billion dollars on the ground, and a billion of vessels floating in the port every day, protects the infrastructure of the port but it also protects our culture and protects our way of life. [17:30] I mean without the industry here and without being able to live here we would not be able to stay here, we would have to move away. So you need the business and industry and you also need to protect the coastal wetlands and that will allow you to enjoy all the resources there are. The

natural resources of the fishing industry are there to enjoy as well as the opportunity to work which is also another natural resource. The port is created because of Bayou Lafourche flowing in the Gulf of Mexico. It was a natural resource that we again took an opportunity to maintain and create jobs in industry.

BERGERON: If you wanted to reach out to the viewers and say, “We’re having a discussion about the port. We’re having a discussion about restoration. But I don’t want you guys to forget.” So what would you be telling the people who are looking at this video that you don’t want them to forget?

BREAUX: [18:34] I don’t want you to forget that the port sits in the middle of the two biggest estuaries. Don’t ever forget that. I’ve had many people, we’d look at how we get here, how do we maintain, how do we save this area. And I tell many people, there are many people out there who claim that the way to save the natural resources is to, or to save resources is to not have any human intervention. And, I tell people, and I understand what they mean. But, I also tell them, if you get up in a helicopter and look from the sky at coastal Louisiana, if you look to the east of Grand Isle, the islands are deteriorated. There is very little protection for the marshes. The marshes are failing fast because of that non-protection. And you also look to the west of Port Fourchon you’re going to see deteriorated barrier islands, you’re going to see deteriorated marshes. And then dead in the center of Louisiana you have Grand Isle, the only inhabited island in Louisiana. It still exists, pretty much intact. And you have Port Fourchon that still exists and is still intact. And the reason is, there are people there. Grand Isle has people living there. Fourchon

has people working there. And because those two entities exist on those barrier islands or right on the coastal zone, they're still there. [20:11] So my hope is that one day the nation will wake up and assist the state in trying to rebuild coastal Louisiana. And actually, there is a place to start, it's in the middle, there's a highway system here that you can access the eastern and western sides of the state to rebuild it. If you didn't have Fourchon then this would be gone as well. If you didn't have people living in Grand Isle, it would be gone as well. So an island that's underwater or that doesn't exist anymore has zero habitat for wildlife. That is my opinion. Right now, it may be sharing 50% of that habitat with people but 50% is better than zero; and the same thing in Fourchon. Belle Passe was dug some 40-something years ago. Belle Passe was dug and material was stacked to make levees on either side and today because of that dredging and stacking of material there are scrub oaks and trees that are growing and that is one of the biggest nesting areas for Roseate Spoonbills. And, if Belle Passe wouldn't have been dug, I wonder where would the Roseate Spoonbills nest? Where would the egrets nest? The birds that need taller trees? Because naturally there are very few trees left. So, they only exist on...natural ridges are disappearing and not being rebuilt and they've been here for hundreds of years... well this ridge here that's manmade has been here for some 50 plus years. And that's kind of an idea of why we're trying to recreate that maritime forest ridge is some of the things that mother nature put here years ago are disappearing and we can assist by helping build them. And it's quite an interesting story, you still have 240 vessels going in and out of the channels per day on the side of one the biggest rookeries and they coexist. It can coexist side-by-side. [22:29] If you think about your planning, you think about what you're doing, you think about how you're developing then you can create some coexistence between industry and nature.

BERGERON: That's definitely for sure. I want to ask a couple of questions about CWPPRA because we're here representing CWPPRA. CWPPRA has been in the restoration business for 20 years, kind of trying to help where they can, build some projects. I guess the question would be, "How do you feel about the CWPPRA program and what's been done?"

BREAUX: [23:05] If I'm not mistaken I think we've joint ventured with CWPPRA. We've done beach restoration projects, we've done West Belle Passe project. This was a state project to rebuild marshes on the western side of Belle Passe which there again is a double benefit. It benefits the port and the industry here by allowing dredge spoils in close proximity to Belle Passe to be deposited while it recreates marsh as well as protects that channel from a washout that would just fill it in, silt it in. So, why wouldn't you work together in building a project that would rebuild some wetlands, protect the industry as well as give some new environment for nature? So we've worked on projects like that. The state was ready to give up on the project because there were some oyster lease issues. The port being familiar with the people in the community, knowing who had oyster leases was able to talk to those people and convince them that this was a beneficial project and get them to sign waivers, releases, and the project was done. We figured that was something we can do to assist. And we were able to get that accomplished. So, doing joint venture projects is a great asset to everyone.

BERGERON: That's kind of interesting that you mention that CWPPRA does take their partners and lets them do things that they know they can't do. That's really great that y'all were able to do that.

BREAUX: [24:44] Yeah, and that's one thing and anything. Anything you're planning and looking at doing think about how it will affect someone else. And if you think about how it will affect someone else and work with them, then you also think, how can it affect them positively and put that in your plan. Don't just plan with blinders on looking at what you're trying to do, look at the big picture. Look at how it will affect other people. Building a maritime forest ridge and having DNR [Department of Natural Resources] wanting to provide the trees for it, having companies want to assist in planting on it, you know, it will become a success story. One day we'd like to have this thing grow it from 6,000 feet long to 12,000 feet long, tie in to LA-1, maybe talk to the Audubon Institute, you know, some group that would want to put a little welcoming center and create a walking trail on it so that people could actually walk the ridge and see what's on the ridge as well as what's on the French Marsh that's on the sides of it. We have a long term plan for it and hopefully we will get there with assistance from people one day.

BERGERON: I hope you're successful. That would be an awesome project to have related to close to industry; Industry and nature are important together. Well, I think you've talked about your engagement with industry and restoration together. Is there anything else you want people to know about you or your commitment to Louisiana? Sort of like why? You've been after this kind of a long time! Why do you stay after it?

BREAUX: I have. Well, I guess it's just in my nature, loving coastal Louisiana or loving Louisiana in general, the entire state. But, I love living in South Louisiana. My wife's family has

a camp within twelve minutes from here on Grand Isle, the inhabited island. I'll leave here on Fridays and spend the weekend and I'm 12 minutes away from work; but I'm on vacation.

[27:09] Coastal Louisiana means a lot to me. It means a lot to my family. Getting to see my kids grow up here is something I strive for. I've stayed in the operations end of the port and that is just because I love building things; and when you can build facilities as well as rebuild marshes. The time frame I've been here, we've created 700 acres of marsh and now we are working on an additional 400 acres of marsh surrounding the port. I've seen us do beach projects and rebuild beaches. I'm watching us, you know, we're building a maritime forest ridge. It's just amazing to see what opportunities are there with the industry and the protection, you know, that we see. The commission I work for is elected. So the people in this community really say what they want and being part of that community. You know, we have an oysterman, a fourth generation oysterman that's on our board, we have someone who works in the shrimping industry, we have people in other industries, so we have a very diverse board that listens to all walks of life from our community and they all want the same thing. They all way to sustain our community and hope their kids and grandkids can stay here and live here if they choose.

BERGERON: Yeah, it's a good place to live, a good place to have for our kids. We want to thank you today for taking time to talk with us and tell people what's going on here at the very edge of the coast and what we need.

Tape Ends **[28:55]**