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St. Charles Parish to dedicate monument to ferry disaster

By **Matt Scallan, The Times-Picayune**
October 15, 2009, 5:15AM

St. Charles Parish residents, many of whom lined the levees after **the Oct. 20, 1976, Luling ferry disaster**, will come together again on Saturday to remember.

Parish officials **will dedicate a memorial** to the tragedy, which claimed 77 of the 95 people aboard when the ferry George Prince collided with the Norwegian tankership Frosta.

The dedication will be held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at St. Charles Parish's East Bank Bridge Park under the Hale Boggs Bridge on Interstate 310 in Destrehan.

The collision occurred as the George Prince approached the west bank ferry landing near the foot of Paul Maillard Road in Luling at about 6:15 a.m. in what the 1978 Coast Guard report described as a "clear, crisp pre-dawn darkness."

The 120-foot-long ferry turned into the path of the 665-foot Frosta, which could not stop in time. Though the ferry had the right of way under navigation rules at the time, it was customary that the smaller ferries let the larger ships by in close proximity.

The Frosta rammed the George Prince on its port side, pushing the shallow draft ferry for a short distance before it flipped, trapping many of the passengers inside the enclosed passenger seating area, and others inside their cars. All of the crew perished, and only 18 passengers survived.



Brett Duke/The Times-Picayune

St. Charles Parish officials gather at the monument, which was designed by Parish Councilman Paul Hogan.

The monument, designed by Parish Councilman Paul Hogan, is literally in the shadow of the Hale Boggs Bridge, which was under construction when the disaster occurred.



Brett Duke/The Times-Picayune

St. Charles Parish Councilman Larry Cochran inspects the memorial to the 1976 Luling ferry disaster at the East Bank Bridge Park in Destrehan.

The monument, built with donated materials and labor, is located at the parish's East Bank Bridge Park, just over a mile away from the spot where the victims boarded the doomed ferry.

"It's been a lot of work, but it's been worth it," said Councilman Larry Cochran, whose district includes the old ferry landing. "We have relatives of the victims coming in from all over the country."

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The project has a lot of significance for Terry Dufrene, a superintendent for Frickey Brothers Construction, which built the base and the brickwork for the monument.

"I was in seventh grade at J.B. Martin (middle school) when my math teacher came in. She was as white as a sheet," he said. "She had gotten off the ferry right before this happened."

Parish President V.J. St. Pierre Jr. said the disaster was one of the defining moments in the lives of those who lived in the parish in the 1970s.

"We all remember where we were when we learned about the accident, just like we remember the JFK assassination or the moon landing. It was a time for both banks of the river to come together to support one another and mourn the loss of so many."

There is a monument to the disaster on the grounds of the St. John the Baptist Parish Courthouse in Edgard, financed partially with proceeds from the class-action lawsuit filed against the state.

The monument was placed there rather than in St. Charles because parish officials could not agree where it should be placed, according to contemporary news reports.

The disaster seemed largely out of mind for most parish residents until 2006, when filmmaker Royd Anderson produced a film about the accident to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the tragedy. The film, which roused the families of many of the victims to demand that a monument be placed in St. Charles Parish, led to the formation of the committee, which included parish officials and victims' family members.

Amy Abadie of LaPlace will be there along with her parents and four sisters. They will be holding a photograph of her brother, Mark Abadie, who died in the disaster.

"I was 12 and he was 19. I feel like I didn't have a chance to get to know him. But I miss him very much," she said.

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Matt Scallan can be reached at msscallan@timespicayune.com or 985.652.0953.

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Part of the ferry George Prince juts above the surface of the Mississippi River after a collision with a Norwegian tanker Oct. 21, 1976. The accident left 77 dead.

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Posted by [dayrunner27](#)
October 15, 2009, 10:37AM

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Posted by [nattyfred](#)
October 15, 2009, 12:14PM

There was a song written about this tragedy that I used to hear on WTUL radio in the early eighties Does anyone know the title and author? I remember the accident and am glad there will finally be a monument in St. Charles Parish.

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