

Guest Column to The News-Star  
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From: Mayor James E. "Jamie" Mayo  
City of Monroe, LA

## **Monroe is a Real City!**

One month ago, we were blessed to host the Johnson-Buckner-Hudson-Wiggins family reunion right here in Monroe, LA. It was an opportunity for me to meet a substantial portion of my family for the first time. More than 200 attended the gathering. They came from across the United States, including: Illinois, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, Missouri, Texas, Louisiana, and other states.

We participated in several group events, including, but not limited to touring the Louisiana Purchase Gardens & Zoo, our family farm in Collingston, LA, the Bayou Black Open Rodeo, and the Eddie Robinson Museum. Our local family members told our visiting kin about the rich history of northeast Louisiana, especially Monroe. We shared with them that Monroe is the birthplace of Delta Airlines, one of the first places Coca-Cola was bottled, home of the corporate headquarters of CenturyLink, Vantage, and more. They were surprised to learn that we have the University of Louisiana at Monroe, Delta Community College, and operations of Chase, IBM, and Gardner Denver-Thomas.

Many of them toured Monroe during their free time. They had the opportunity to see a variety of neighborhoods, schools, businesses, restaurants and stores. They saw our beautiful Ouachita River, Pecanland Mall and more of the great amenities Monroe has to offer.

Most of my relatives are from the Chicago area. While chatting with some of them, that weekend, they (half-serious/half-jokingly) said "Monroe is a real city". I asked them to expound on what they meant by that statement. And, they admitted to being apprehensive about coming to Monroe. They thought we were a small country town in the middle of nowhere, with nothing to offer. However, after being here for a few days, touring our city and experiencing some of our southern charm and hospitality, they were very impressed.

Sometimes it takes an "outsider" to help you appreciate the positive things around you every day. We are grateful for the national rankings that show our city, university, college, schools, hospitals, economy and more in a positive light. We also must challenge ourselves to work closer together when we are shown in a negative light (whether we agree or disagree with the rankings). Yes, Monroe is a real city. Monroe is a really great city! And, we will continue working together to move her to the next level.