

# N.O. 'smart city' project terminated

## Private firms pull out of controversial talks

BY MATT SLEDGE  
 Staff writer

A consortium of private firms has pulled out of talks with New Orleans officials for a "smart city" broadband project, amid growing scrutiny from the City Council concerning links between the

companies, a consulting firm and two city officials involved in the bid process.

The Smart+Connected NOLA partnership said Monday that it will no longer pursue an agreement with the city more than nine months after it won the right to negotiate a contract.

Late Monday, Mayor LaToya Cantrell's administration said it would be issuing a fresh solicitation for a "smart city" project.

The Mayor's Office originally intended to sign a 15-year agreement with the consortium, which includes Qualcomm, an investment firm cofounded by Magic

Johnson called JLC Infrastructure and other companies. The plan called for internet-connected city infrastructure like streetlights and expanded internet access for low-income residents.

Yet questions arose over the close ties between a consulting firm that advised the city during the solicitation process and the contractors who were angling for the deal. Critics also said the proposed deal with the private consortium

lacked details. Adding to the concerns, the Cantrell administration acknowledged last week that two city officials who played key roles in writing and awarding the smart city solicitation had provided "pro bono" advice to Qualcomm on a smart city project in Los Angeles through a private company they cofounded.

► See **TERMINATED**, page 6A

# Richmond to leave White House post

## Next role said to be with Democratic National Committee

BY TYLER BRIDGES  
 Staff writer

Cedric Richmond, who left a safe seat representing New Orleans in Congress to become a top adviser to President Joe Biden, is resigning his White House post to become a strategist for the Democratic National Committee, a person familiar with his plans who spoke on the condition of anonymity said Monday.

Richmond, who has spent the past 15 months as director of the White House's Office of Public Engagement, has yet to spell out his exact plans. He didn't respond to two requests for an interview on Monday.

"He's likely to help the president and the party working on the outside, where he has tremendous clout and contacts," said Donna Brazile, a Kenner native who has twice chaired the Democratic National Committee. Richmond, she added, "is a seasoned veteran who knows Capitol Hill and Biden's massive group of volunteers."



Richmond

► See **RICHMOND**, page 6A

# SALUTING THE FRENCHIES

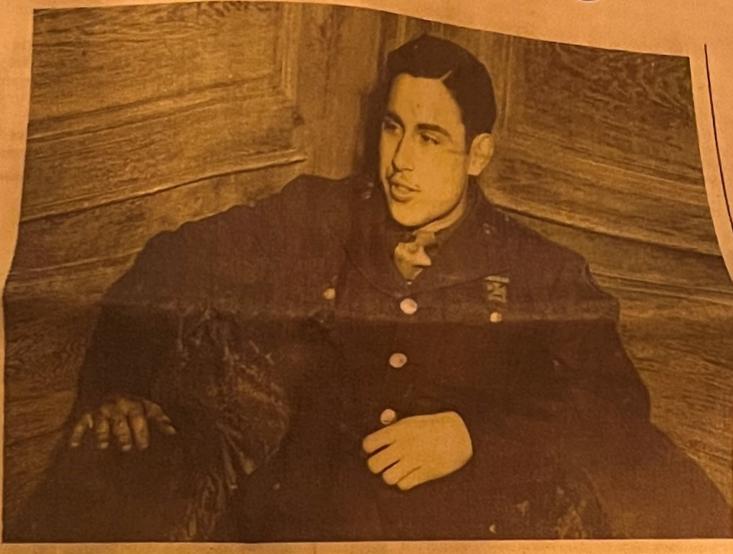


PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE MORVANT FAMILY  
 Norris Morvant, a Louisiana native who worked as a French translator during World War II, is shown with his Bronze Star Medal in 1944.

# National WWII Museum to honor Cajun translators who helped win the war

BY JOHN POPE  
 Contributing writer

When Norris Morvant was growing up in Thibodaux, he was made to feel ashamed. The reason: He spoke French.

When Morvant served in the Army Air Corps in World War II, he was selected to work in the office of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme Allied commander in Europe, and Gen. George Patton awarded him a Bronze Star. The reason: He spoke French.

Morvant was one of thousands of Cajuns from south Louisiana and Acadians from Canada who became assets to the Allied cause because they were fluent in French, a language they had been pressured to give up in favor of English.

But because they were bilingual, these soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines could translate documents, decipher messages and speak directly with the people whose countries the Allies were liberating. Some were recruited for the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA.

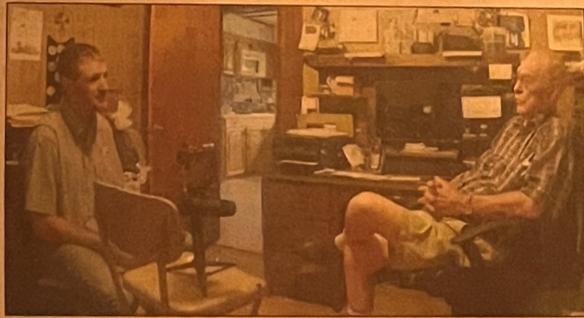


PHOTO PROVIDED BY JASON THERIOT  
 Jason Theriot, left, interviews Norris Morvant in 2021 about Morvant's experiences as a French translator during World War II. Morvant and two other Frenchies are set to be honored Wednesday at The National WWII Museum in New Orleans.

"It was an honor," said Morvant, 98, who didn't speak English until he was 6. "I'm so glad that I knew French because I was able to get around, and I didn't have to hesitate about talking to anyone. We got along real well."

The contributions of these men, who

were collectively known as Frenchies, will be celebrated at 2 p.m. Wednesday in The National WWII Museum's U.S. Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center. Registration for the program

► See **FRENCHIES**, page 4A

# Musk to buy Twitter for \$44B

## Billionaire plans to privatize company

BY TOM KRISHER and MATT O'BRIEN  
 Associated Press

Elon Musk reached an agreement to buy Twitter for roughly \$44 billion on Monday, promising a more lenient touch to policing content on the social media platform where he — the world's richest person — promotes his interests, attacks critics and opines on a wide range of issues to more than 83 million followers. The outspoken Tesla CEO has said he wanted to own and privatize Twitter

► See **TWITTER**, page 4A

WEATHER

HIGH 79  
 LOW 62

PAGE 10A



Business .....	3D	Commentary .....	5B	Nation-World .....	2A
Classified .....	8D	Deaths .....	3B	Opinion .....	4B
Comics-Puzzles .....	4D-7D	Living .....	1D	Sports .....	1C

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# WWII Museum to honor 'Frenchies,' Cajun translators who helped to win the war

BY JOHN POPE | CONTRIBUTING WRITER  
APR 26, 2022 - 4:00 AM



Alfred Benoit poses with unidentified people in France, 1944

PHOTO COURTESY ALFRED BENOIT FAMILY

John Pope

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**'We got along real well'**



Jason Theriot, left, interviews Norris Morvant in 2021 about Morvant's experiences as a French translator during World War II. PHOTO COURTESY JASON THERIOT

"It was an honor," said Morvant, 98, who didn't speak English until he was 6. "I'm so glad that I knew French because I was able to get around, and I didn't have to hesitate about talking to anyone. We got along real well."

The contributions of these men, who were collectively known as Frenchie, will be celebrated Wednesday at 2 p.m. in the National WWII Museum's U.S. Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center. Registration for the program will be conducted in person and online.



Norris Morvant in 1944. Punished at home in Louisiana for speaking French, Morvant and other Cajuns became integral to the war effort during World War II thanks to their language skills.

PHOTO COURTESY MORVANT FAMILY

Morvant, who was one of about 25,000 Cajuns who served in World War II, will be one of three Frenchie honored on Wednesday, along with Addy Melancon and Shirley Guidry. This salute represents the culmination of an idea that began in eastern Canada, which includes Cajuns' ancestral home, and south Louisiana, where Acadians migrated after the British drove them out.

### **The last hurrah**

Because the Frenchie are in their 90s – or older – and because the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that about 234 World War II veterans are dying every day, "this is kind of like the last hurrah for them," said Jason Theriot, who has

conducted oral-history interviews of about 200 Frenchie since 2000. "It's a race against time."



U.S. Army mechanic Isadore Labbe with unidentified people in France, 1944.

PHOTO COURTESY JOAN BOUDREAU

The Frenchies' oral histories were the subject of his master's thesis; a self-published three-volume book, "To Honor Our Veterans: An Oral History of World War II Veterans From the Bayou Country"; and the Frenchie Podcast, which is available on all major podcasting platforms.

Theriot is working on another book about the Frenchies for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press.

Theriot, a New Iberia native with a background in broadcast journalism, said he was inspired to start the interviews after taking his grandfathers to the June 2000 opening of what was then known as the National D-Day Museum.

### **Canadian connection**

The Canadian connection to this project also began in New Orleans. Noella De Maina, who heads the political and public affairs section of the Canadian consulate general in Dallas, had spent four years working in national defense. Given that background, her time in New Orleans and a sense of history, De Maina started to explore the ties between Acadians and Cajuns, whom she described as "expelled Acadians."

These French speakers from the United States and Canada "were posted together and served together," said De Maina, who likened them to the Navajo code talkers, whose unwritten language was used to confuse the Japanese.

"They worked shoulder to shoulder," she said, "but I don't think this story was ever told."

De Maina, whose government gave Theriot some seed money for his project, said she hopes he will come to Canada to conduct interviews there, adding, “We’re trying to get as many stories as we can.”

One of Theriot’s interviewees was Morvant, who said that being a Frenchie was an honor. In his office, he grew accustomed to seeing the likes of Gen. Charles de Gaulle, leader of the Free French forces, and Winston Churchill, the British prime minister.

### **A badge of honor**



Norris Morvant is shown with his Bronze Star medal, in 1944  
PHOTO COURTESY MORVANT FAMILY

Morvant, who frequently delivered messages to the front, got his biggest assignment when he was ordered to deliver gasoline three days in a row to Patton, who was preparing for what would become known as the Battle of the Bulge.

“I carried 2,500 gallons of gas from Le Havre to Belgium, picked up an empty truck and brought it back (full) the next day,” Morvant said. “When I went back to headquarters, I was told to meet with a certain colonel. I thought I had done something wrong, but Gen. Patton had sent me a Bronze Star.”

Because of the work of Morvant and his French-speaking colleagues, being called a Frenchie was “a badge of honor,” Theriot said. “The experience in World War II instilled in these veterans a renewed pride in their heritage that had not been felt for several generations.”

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CONTACT JOHN POPE AT [PINCKELOPES@GMAIL.COM](mailto:PINCKELOPES@GMAIL.COM).



# U.S. museum honours Acadian veteran

Late Alphonse Vautour among French-speaking soldiers to be feted at New Orleans museum

**ALAN COCHRANE**  
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Alphonse Vautour of Shediac, who died last month at age 102, will be one of many Acadian and Cajun veterans of the Second World War to be remembered during an event at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans Wednesday.

Jason Theriot, a researcher and author in Houston, Texas, says a video interview done last fall with Vautour talking about his wartime experiences will be part of a tribute ceremony at the New Orleans museum.

"Dad was always willing to talk about his experience of the war. He thought it was important to keep this piece of history alive," Alphonse's daughter, Monique Vautour, said Monday.

Alphonse Vautour served with the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment during the Second World War and was among the first soldiers of the unit to land on Juno Beach in Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer, France, on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

In interviews with the Times & Transcript, Vautour said he and other French-speaking soldiers



**TOP:** Houston, TX-based researcher Jason Theriot interviewed Alphonse Vautour last fall. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Alphonse Vautour, who died March 27 at age 102, served with the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment during the Second World War. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Theriot, a descendant of Acadians who left New Brunswick and settled in Louisiana, says French-speaking Cajuns were uniquely valuable as interpreters for the U.S. and Canadian military during WWII

PHOTO: ALAN COCHRANE/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

PLEASE SEE → **VETERAN, A2**

# Child-care fees to drop by June

**JOHN CHILIBECK**  
THE DAILY GLEANER

Many daycare fees in New Brunswick will drop by half June 1 – six months ahead of schedule – and the provincial government is embarking on an international recruitment campaign to find more qualified early education workers.

The announcement Monday at a French daycare in Fredericton gives a clear timeline for parents, following a pledge in December, when the Trudeau Liberal government in Ottawa announced it had made a deal with the province to eventually bring \$10-a-day child care by 2026.

"Child care is not a luxury," said Karina Gould, the federal minister of families, children and social development, at the press conference at Au P'tit Monde de Franco. "I was a cabinet minister in the federal government with a two-year-old at home for six months at the beginning of the pandemic. It's quite challenging to get your work done when you have a two-year-old who wants your attention, right? So there is a necessity here."

PLEASE SEE → **FEES, A4**

# U.S. museum honours Acadian veteran

## VETERAN →A1

learned to adapt to life in the Canadian army which, at the time, did everything in English, but they became a valuable asset when the regiment landed in France and translators were needed.

Theriot has spent more than 20 years researching the contribution of French-speaking Acadian soldiers from Canada and their Cajun cousins from Louisiana. He believes their contribution should never be forgotten and is sharing the stories through podcasts, his website and a book.

He says Acadians and Cajuns grew up speaking French and were often ridiculed when they entered the U.S. and Canadian armed forces. However, their ability to speak French became valuable when Allies landed in North Africa and later in France and Belgium, where they needed to communicate with local people, including the French resistance.

"I'm from south Louisiana. My ancestors came from Acadia in 1765 and settled in the town of Theriot in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana. My grandfather didn't learn to speak English," said Theriot.

"It started out with me interviewing both my grandfathers, who were both French-speaking Cajuns, and it mushroomed into this much larger project." Between 2000 and 2005, Theriot interviewed more than 100 veterans from South Louisiana.

"I do not speak French, my parents did not speak French, they did not pass it down, and I wanted to understand why," he said. "What I learned was that there was a large contingent of soldiers who utilized their French as interpreters, in special forces and communications. I wanted to know how that affected them because they grew up with people who were stigmatized for speaking French and roundly criticized as ignorant

## Theriot has spent more than 20 years researching the contribution of French-speaking Acadian soldiers from Canada and their Cajun cousins from Louisiana

peasants."

But from that stigma, he said, the U.S. military became aware of the value of having French-speaking soldiers, as did the Canadian army with mixed units like the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment.

"For the first time, these Cajuns realized the value of being bilingual and the uniqueness of their culture," he said.

"It took them 20 years, but some of those veterans were instrumental in passing the 1968 legislation that would form CODOFIL, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, which was instrumental in promoting bilingualism in New Brunswick."

Theriot said he plans to re-visit New Brunswick to re-trace his roots and connect with long-lost relatives.

• *The ceremony will be recorded and posted to the museum's website at [nationalww2museum.org](http://nationalww2museum.org). Theriot's own podcasts about the history of Acadian and Cajun soldiers can be found on his website at [jasontheriot.com](http://jasontheriot.com).*

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