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BELLE CHASSE ACADEMY DEDICATION CEREMONY

BELLE CHASSE, March 28, 2003 – A ceremony dedicating the Belle Chasse Academy was held Friday at the Naval Air Station, Joint Reserve Base New Orleans in Belle Chasse, Louisiana. The academy's board of directors welcomed many visitors and dignitaries to this landmark occasion.

"Today, we are celebrating new educational opportunities for students in the Plaquemines Parish/New Orleans area," says John Schwab, chairman of the Belle Chasse Academy Board of Directors. "We have nearly 700 students enrolled this year, with a projected future capacity of 900 students."

Opened to students in August 2002, the Belle Chasse Academy is already having a positive impact on the educational system in Plaquemines Parish. With construction of 525 additional units of housing at the Naval Air Station, the parish educational system did not have the capacity to accommodate the additional students. Today's enrollment of 700 students in kindergarten through eighth grade dramatically eases the student overload.

USDA Rural Development's Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program funded construction of this unique school. "This is a one-of-a-kind school—the only charter school ever built on a military installation," said Michael B. Taylor, Louisiana Rural Development State Director. "Rural Development is proud to be a part of it." Rural Development invested over \$13 million in guaranteed loan funds to the Whitney National Bank from the Rural Housing Service Community Facilities Program to construct this school.

USDA Rural Development provides a full range of rural development credit services in rural Louisiana. Further information on USDA Rural Development's loan and grant programs can be obtained by visiting Rural Development's web site at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>.

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