

Pineville senior takes on project to save Dairy Barn



Jeff Matthews, jmatthews@thetowntalk.com, (318) 487-6380 2:13 p.m. CDT October 28, 2015

Student looks to raise \$70,000 for threatened landmark



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(Photo: Jeff Matthews/The Town Talk)

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The campaign to save the iconic Central Dairy Barn has a new face.

Rebekah Gauthier, a 17-year-old Pineville High School student, has taken on the challenge of raising \$70,000 to fund repairs to the barn's threatened north wall for her senior project.

The north wall is the most pressing need in an estimated \$250,000 effort to stabilize the Pineville landmark and protect it from the elements.

"It's something I've seen up on the hill all my life, but I never really knew anything about it," Gauthier said. "The more I've learned about it, the more excited I am to help."

Built in 1923 to service Central Louisiana State Hospital, the Dairy Barn is one of the more recognizable and beloved historic structures still standing in the area. But years of standing vacant and untouched have taken a toll, and without action stakeholders fear the site could be lost.



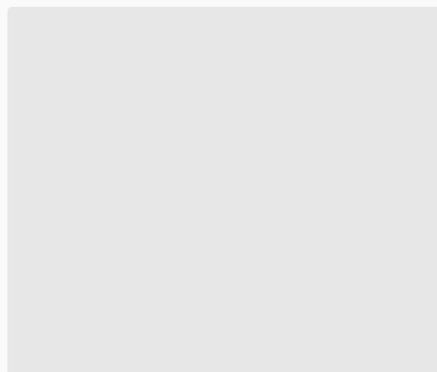
A group has been working to save the Central Dairy Barn. The landmark in Pineville is in danger of deteriorating is stabilization work is not done. (Photo: Melinda Martinez/mmartinez@thetowntalk.com)

Months ago, a group of concerned citizens started a grass-roots effort to protect the barn, with the hope it will eventually be restored and renovated for some type of use again. They immediately started making a mark.

A [Facebook page](#) has generated nearly 10,000 "likes." In February, a team led by Pan American Engineers did a full assessment of the property.

The [report](#) that came out of that assessment offered several alternatives, ranging from taking no action to multi-million dollar renovations that would make the barn ready for reuse.

Organizers of the "Save the Dairy Barn at Buhlow Lake" effort, which was recently



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organized as a nonprofit under that name, are focusing on the minimum repairs needed to halt further deterioration. That includes reroofing, repairing exterior walls and repainting of the exterior, and is projected to cost \$250,000.

Save the Dairy Barn at Buhlow Lake has established a Paypal account and is establishing a Red Basket fund for donations ([Red Basket](#) is similar to gofundme, but collects no fees, so all donations made through the site go to the supported project). It's close to a cooperative endeavor agreement that will allow it to use the money it raises on the barn, which is still state property.



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The first \$70,000 raised will go to rehabbing the exterior wall that faces north, overlooking Lake Buhlow, which the assessment found to be the most damaged and exposed part of the building.

"When I heard \$250,000, I thought that was great," said Kendra Van Cleef, who started the Facebook page that turned into the Save the Barn effort. "That's very doable."

"The response from the community has been overwhelming," said Roger Corley, a member of the Save the Barn committee.

Gauthier got involved through her pastor, Nathan Martin, a Pineville city councilman and member of the Save the Barn committee. Martin had seen Gauthier raise thousands of dollars through the years for several mission trips to a Mexico orphanage, he said, "so I knew she had it in her."



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"After talking to him, I just got real excited about it," said Gauthier, who also was inspired by teachers talking about previous students' senior projects, including one who raised \$60,000 to help disabled veterans.

"I wasn't thinking \$70,000," Martin said. "I just thought it was a great idea for a senior project. I thought, 'Maybe she'll raise \$500 or \$1,000.' So when she said \$70,000, you could have knocked me over with a feather. But if anybody can do it, Rebekah can."

Gauthier is currently selling bumper stickers for \$20 and plans to hold a student raffle. She hopes to implement other ideas in a fundraising campaign that will last through February.

Save the Dairy Barn at Buhlow Lake is channeling all its efforts into Gauthier's campaign while it's active, seeing her as the perfect person to spread their message.

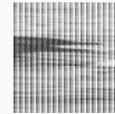
"It's the most ambitious thing I've ever seen," Van Cleef said. "It makes me almost weep, because it means the barn means something to young people. It's an icon they've seen all their life, but if we don't do something to save it, it will be gone."

For more information on the Save the Barn effort, visit <https://www.facebook.com/Save-the-Dairy-Barn-at-Buhlow-Lake-1527535524155059/> or <http://www.savethedairybarn.com/>.



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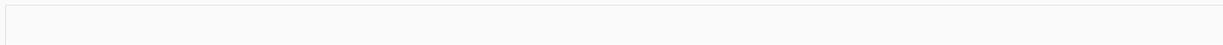
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A group walks through the loft area of the Central Dairy Barn during a tour hosted by the Central Louisiana State Cemetery Preservation Committee in 2012. (Photo: Melinda Martinez/mmartinez@theto, The Town Talk)

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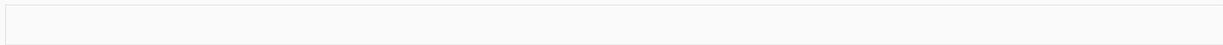
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