

# Future museum on the move

## Mess hall transported to Katy park

By **HEATHER L. NICHOLSON**  
hnicholson@katycourier.com

With a crew of six and a flatbed truck, the city relocated another piece of Katy's past.

The former Katy gas plant employee mess hall was moved about a mile down the road last week to Katy Heritage Park at 5990 George Bush Drive. The white wooden building is the newest addition to Heritage Park, which already houses the Wright Museum, Featherston House, Stockdick House and the old Post Office.

Used for nearly three decades at Katy gas field's Humble Cycling Plant, the mess hall has been a part of Katy since the beginning. Katy Heritage Society president Carol Adams said people often think it was rice that put Katy on the map, but it was actually the gas plant.

"Rice has been important and certainly endured through time, but it was that plant that made all the aviation fuel for World War II and doubled our population," she said.

After an unusually dramatic prairie fire in 1909, early oil and gas explorers began eyeing Katy as the next boom in Texas. They found the coveted gas well and started engineering a plant in 1940. Because of its huge reserves and proximity to Houston refineries, Katy became the most important gas-condensate field in the nation.

World War II only catapulted Katy further, spurring the area to form a city. From 1925 to 1942, Katy's population was reported at 400. By the plant's opening in 1943, the population rose to 800.

The Heritage Society had been



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**It only took 15 minutes for the City of Katy to move the Humble Cycling Plant employee mess hall to Heritage Park on last week. The 20- by 50-foot building was lifted and driven a mile down the road. The historic building was used as a mess hall in the 1930s and 1940s and then sold to a local church that has been using it for worship services for 47 years. Katy Heritage Society plans to turn the mess hall into an oil and gas museum.**

interested in acquiring the mess hall for some time, but it wasn't until a local church approached the society this year about moving the building that it became a reality. The Heritage Society wanted another abandoned building from the old gas plant, but discovered it was too big to move.

"The mess hall is good because it's smaller and easier to handle," Adams said. "We were excited when they said we could have it."

St. Paul's Episcopal Church at 1936 Drexel Drive purchased the mess hall from the gas plant in 1958 for \$1,000 and used it as a sanctuary. Senior Warden Jennifer Gillespie said the aged shotgun building has affected many people

over the years.

"It has touched innumerable lives. We're grateful it will be preserved as an important part of the community," Gillespie said.

From a place to eat to a place to worship, the mess hall seamlessly fell into its new role. The church added a small white steeple to the roof, installed carpeting, dry wall and constructed four separate classrooms. For 47 years the mess hall was a Sunday school, worship center and small-town sanctuary.

It finally came time to part with the historic building when St. Paul's members completed a new center in May. Nearly four times the size of the mess hall, Gillespie said it only made sense to donate

the old church to the Heritage Society.

After four months of planning, the 20- by 50-foot mess hall was lifted from the ground and transported at a swift 10 mph through the heart of Old Katy to its final resting place. The entire ordeal took 15 minutes.

But moving the building was the easy part. Now, the Heritage Society has the task of turning the four-room church into an oil and gas museum. Adams said they will hook up the building's utilities and paint the exterior first. They hope to persuade Houston oil and gas companies to fund the restoration project and turn the mess hall into another Katy museum.