

BUSINESS SCOPE

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With La. honey, Zydeco Meadery pours Creole culture into every bottle

By Candace J. Semien
Contributing Writer

(Jozef Syndicate) — Founded by Eric and DeAundra Depradine, Zydeco Meadery reflects Louisiana's cultural reach well beyond state lines. Though the meadery operates in Massachusetts, the family's roots in Acadiana and the Caribbean anchor the brand firmly in Louisiana tradition, as detailed in feature coverage by *KREOL Magazine*, the *Boston Globe*, and *Black Southern Belle*.

DeAundra Depradine grew up in Acadiana, where zydeco was woven into everyday life, and the couple met while attending the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, according to Zydeco Meadery's company

history. The company takes its name from zydeco music, a genre born in southwest Louisiana's Creole communities.

The significance of Zydeco Meadery lies not only in ingredients but in how Louisiana culture expands. From dance halls to kitchen tables, Creole traditions have always adapted and endured. Zydeco Meadery extends that tradition into the craft beverage space.

"We're proud to create something that honors our heritage while welcoming others to enjoy it," Eric Depradine said. He is a graduate of UL-Lafayette in history and chemistry and has worked various municipal governments in Louisiana and Missouri regulating federal and local wastewater laws.

The idea for Zydeco Meadery took shape after the couple honeymooned in Washington state's wine country. The original dream was winemaking. But Louisiana's hot, humid climate made traditional grape growing impractical. Returning home inspired but realistic, they began asking why they couldn't produce something equally meaningful using ingredients native to Louisiana. The Depradines turned to mead, one of the world's oldest fermented beverages made with honey rather than grapes.

Avoyelles Parish's abundance of wildflower honey made the choice both practical and symbolic.

In Louisiana, they maintained an extensive vegetable garden before moving to Kansas City and

starting a farm enterprise. In 2022, the Depradine farm had bee hives and more than 25 cultivars of apples, which was used to make blended apple juice with honey and converted to a delicious alcohol.

The family officially launched Zydeco Meadery in 2024 from North Attleborough, Massachusetts, after Eric graduated from Highland Community College's enology certificate program. Operated by four generations of the Depradine family, Zydeco Meadery is one of four minority-owned alcohol manufacturers in Kansas.

Despite the geographic distance, Louisiana remains central to the brand's identity. Many of the meads use Louisiana wildflower honey, and the flavor profiles reflect Creole and



Louisiana's rhythmic gumbo of cultures — Creole, Cajun, French Caribbean and African — has long resonated through its music, food and festivals. That same blend of heritage is now being bottled in a distinctly modern way by Eric Depradine, owner of Zydeco Meadery, the Black-owned craft beverage company that infuses Louisiana identity into honey wine known as mead.

Caribbean traditions shared across the African diaspora.

One of Zydeco Meadery's signature offerings is Carnival Rose, a hibiscus-based mead inspired by sorrel, a traditional holiday spiced drink enjoyed throughout the Caribbean, West Africa and parts of the Gulf South. The drink's vivid color and spice infusion of cinnamon, clove, Allspice notes reflect cultural celebrations that span generations and borders. Depradine took his wife's suggestion to try sorrel mead inspired by his grandmother Ena's recipe. She was 91 at the time. And today, Carnival Rose is one of their best sellers.

"Sorrel is not just a drink, it's a cultural anchor," he said. "Every Caribbean household has memories of making it during the holiday season. Carnival Rose is our way of honoring that tradition."

Their current mead offerings include variations of seasonal fruit meads, t'ej, an Ethiopian mead, and hibiscus a Trinidadian mead. "It unites us back to our ancestors in West Africa," Eric told *Caribbean Beat* magazine.

Bayou Soleil — which is French for "Golden Bayou" — blends Traminette

grape juice with Louisiana wildflower honey from

Avoyelles Parish, producing a bright, citrus mead that reflects the couple's early exposure to German wines like Gewürztraminer and Riesling. The Atlantic Creole uses knotweed honey collected from the rural areas of Massachusetts to produce a semisweet honey wine. At 12 percent alcohol, this mead has a rich, malty, nutty flavor, according to the company's website. Because meads are made from honey it has more fermentable sugars than grapes, leading to a higher alcohol content than wine.

"Representation matters...We want people to see their culture in what we make," he said. "We are dedicated to showcasing our culture and heritage through mead."

Zydeco Meadery has found an audience among Caribbean, Black American, and Creole communities, particularly with the seasonal release of Carnival Rose. The company distributes through select liquor stores, farmers markets and online platforms, expanding access to culturally inspired meads beyond regional boundaries. ◊

Louisiana creates fast track to approve power plants for data centers, big electricity users

Meta will pay 100 percent for its Entergy turbines, but rule changes would only require major power users to cover half the cost

By Wesley Muller
Contributing Writer

(lailluminator.com) — Louisiana regulators have adopted a new rule that suspends certain consumer protections if utility companies need to quickly build power plants for certain industrial developments, including data centers, that require massive amounts of electricity.

The rule change also directs these large-scale customers to pay for half the cost of these new power plants, meaning regular ratepayers could be on the hook for the remaining cost.

In a 4-1 vote on December 17, the Louisiana Public Service Commission adopted the rule, which creates a streamlined approval process that would drastically reduce the time it takes to greenlight utility projects primarily geared toward data centers. The lone dissenting vote came from Commissioner Davante Lewis, D-Baton Rouge, who expressed concerns that the proposal could hurt consumers. Lewis has argued that the commission should focus on making energy less expensive for household customers rather than the wealthiest companies in the world, like Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram that is building the world's largest artificial intelli-



Meta is building what would be the world's largest data center in north Louisiana. Entergy Louisiana plans to spend \$3.2 billion on a power plant to run the center, plus additional money on a related gas plant in south Louisiana and transmission lines. (Meta)

agency permitting. In a phone interview Thursday, he said it lets the commission more easily replicate the quick approval process it used for Entergy Louisiana's construction of a power plant with three natural gas powered turbines to run the massive data center Meta is building in Richland Parish, which the commission signed off on in August.

The commission's vote suspends the competitive bidding requirement that's meant to ensure ratepayers get the best deal available on new power plants. Generally, competitive bidding requires multiple contractors to submit estimates of what it would cost them to complete the job. The estimates are then published and voted on at an open meeting.

Government entities opt for open bidding on most public works contracts to

"This could cut our regulatory process down from, say, two years down to eight months," Coussan said. "This is not a rule in place that can be exploited."

He referenced the recently truncated timeline in which the commission waived its normal rules in special consideration of Meta's needs. The commission approved construction of the Entergy power plant for its Northeast Louisiana facility in August despite intense public opposition to the shortened eight-month timeline, considered very fast in the energy regulatory sphere.

The three gas turbines that Entergy is building for Meta's AI data center will have the capacity to generate 2,200 megawatts of electricity, more than twice what the entire city of New Orleans uses during peak demand hours. Electricity

Randy Young, said at the recent meeting that allowing companies with large power needs to cover only half the cost of new power plants is too lenient and places other ratepayers at risk of having

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