



TIMES PICAYUNE, March 9, 2008

In recognizing the vital role that education plays in maintaining a viable and competent workforce for St. Tammany Parish, our February luncheon showcased panelists from the key institutions involved in the proposed Learning Park, a shared educational complex to be located in the center of the parish.

A sold out crowd of over 125 business leaders gathered at Beau Chene Country Club where four guest speakers discussed the Learning Park and the fundamental part each will play in this significant project. The panel included Mr. Kevin Davis, St. Tammany Parish President; Dr. Randy Moffett, Southeastern Louisiana University President; Dr. Alex Johnson, Delgado Community College Chancellor; and Ms. Gayle Sloan, St. Tammany Parish School System Superintendent.

At the podium, Davis gave a brief overview of the project, explaining that the St. Tammany Parish Public School System and the regional higher education institutions, including Southeastern Louisiana University, University of New Orleans, Delgado Community College, and the Louisiana Technical College System have collaborated on the complex, which will be located on Highway 434 in Lacombe. The 840-acre site was donated by Weyerhaeuser Real Estate Development Co. and will also include corporate, retail, and residential buildings. He expects the project to be completed by the end of 2009.

Next to speak was Dr. Moffett who conveyed his excitement about Southeastern's ability to expand its course offerings through the new facility. He noted the progress of collaboration, and that this unique opportunity would not have been imagined 10 to 12 years ago.

Stating the importance of being able to offer such a variety of programs right here on the north shore, Dr. Johnson enthusiastically noted that Delgado students will now be able to complete their training here in St. Tammany Parish instead of having to commute to other locations, thereby lessening the number of students who drop out.

The magnitude of this project was emphasized by Sloan, who explained that the facility will be used by students from all eight St. Tammany Parish high schools. Students will remain in their home high schools for required coursework and extracurricular activities, and the Learning Park will be a place where they can attend special courses and programs in arts, science, and technology, as well as pursue early college courses and/or technical

training. This opportunity is open to *every* high school student, if they are committed. The educational possibilities for students are exceptional, as well as very cost effective because the offerings will not have to be duplicated at all eight high school sites.

The panel presentation was followed by a brief Q & A period where audience members were allowed to ask their most pertinent questions regarding the new complex, with answers given by the panelists.

Jan Robert, Executive Director of the St. Tammany Healthcare Alliance, made the closing remarks, thanking each speaker for their commitment to this project. She emphasized that the key to successful workforce development efforts, which lead to the continued growth and sustainability of successful communities, is collaboration and partnership, and that this shared campus represents a perfect example of a regional collaborative effort.

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