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Workforce development a big chamber priority

One of our chamber's main goals continues to be workforce development to ensure the needs of businesses are met, and to enable all individuals to be productive, working citizens.

We work hand-in-hand with the First Planning District Workforce Investment Board (WIB), with which we partnered with in late 2005 to address workforce shortages experienced by employers post Katrina. The First Planning District WIB and the St. Tammany West Chamber collaborated to create a workforce and business services center in 2006. Since that time the chamber has continued to serve as a workforce intermediary connecting employers, as the voice of business for West St. Tammany, to employees and education and training providers.

The WIB is comprised of about 25 leaders in businesses and organizations throughout a three-parish region (St. Bernard, Plaquemines and St. Tammany) and extending into other parishes in south Louisiana. It is funded by the federal government through the Workforce Investment Act. I am proud to have served on this board for the last eight years.

Basically the WIB oversees the work at the Business and Career Solutions Centers made possible by WIA funding. It serves as a building block to develop a prepared workforce to meet the needs of businesses in a region. It is about education and training to enable employees to be successful on the job. Because of federal mandates there are several rules and regulations that have to be followed. The bottom line for businesses to understand is that WIA funding is available through the WIB. In some cases, future employees can even be trained directly at the Business and Career Solutions Center, or the WIB will work with training institutions to ensure the courses they are offering meet the needs of employers/businesses in the region.

In the past, our contract with the First Planning District WIB has been renewed annually to assist us with various goals, which address:

- Short and long-term workforce needs of targeted industry sectors
- The development and implementation of recruitment, retention and marketing strategies
- Connecting employers to resources available at the St. Tammany Business and Careers Solutions Center and other economic development organizations.

However, under these economic hardships, there is uncertainty about whether or not this contract will be renewed. Workforce needs and training are critical to St. Tammany's economic development, therefore we are currently examining other avenues of funding to ensure workforce development remains our priority.

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