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COALITION BUILDING

With an emphasis on parishwide cooperation, much progress was made to correlate efforts of the Chamber and the Greater Slidell Area Chamber. Several Executive Committee and Governmental Affairs Committee meetings were held jointly. Also, a consultant was hired through funding from both chambers to review proposed parishwide zoning ordinance changes.

The Chamber led discussions to encourage a stronger NORTHSHORE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE by hosting meetings that featured speakers from the U.S. Chamber and the Louisiana Speaks Center for Planning Excellence. They encouraged regional collaboration in order to meet the needs of and maximize the benefits of explosive population projections. Southeastern Louisiana University hosted a forum to continue discussions on the topic, which was followed by a meeting of chambers and economic development agencies. The birth of a new Northshore regional organization is expected in early 2007.

The Chamber co-hosted the fourth SOUTHERN NIGHTS event during Legislative Session with chambers from Livingston, Tangipahoa, Washington and St. Tammany parishes as well as the SLU Alumni Association. Held for the first-time in the Capitol Rotunda, attendees were afforded the opportunity to speak one-on-one with legislators from across the state.

The Chamber lobbied for creation of a NORTHSHORE HEALTHCARE EDUCATION CENTER in partnership with St. Tammany Healthcare Alliance, SLU, Delgado Community College, Louisiana Technical College and others.

Volunteer leaders represented the Chamber on regional boards and commissions including the GREATER NEW ORLEANS, INC. BOARD AND PUBLIC POLICY COUNCIL, THE ST. TAMMANY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION and REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION. Also, the Chamber president & CEO served on the WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD for St. Tammany, St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes and the METRO CHAMBER ALLIANCE, which encompasses Jefferson, New Orleans, St. Bernard and St. Tammany parishes, as well as the River Region.



MEMBERSHIP

Chamber membership reached its highpoint at **1,028 MEMBERS** with a total of **190 NEW MEMBERS**. With those new businesses included, **27,356 EMPLOYEES** are represented.

The Chamber's information desk serviced over **4,200 PHONE CALLS** and **1,350 WALK-IN VISITORS** requesting information about communities, business referrals, festivals, events and Chamber events.

The Chamber's partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce provided members with

free U.S. CHAMBER FEDERATION MEMBERSHIPS.

The Ambassadors program was expanded to include a reformatted AMBASSADORS COUNCIL as well as DIPLOMATS subcommittees to focus on retention and recruitment. Events Diplomats also served as greeters at networking events.

Ambassadors Council members VISITED **165 NEW CHAMBER MEMBERS** and attended **18 RIBBON CUTTINGS**, which were scheduled for the first and third Thursdays of each month.

RESOURCES

As a result of Accreditation by the U.S. Chamber, a sixth-annual compilation of financial status was composed by an auditor. Membership dues income totaled more than \$310,000 while non-dues and events income totaled more than \$215,000.

Hurricane Katrina inspired a "REEXPO," which showcased the services and products businesses are contributing to "rebuild, recover and renew" the region. Over 100 exhibitors participated.

The 2006 ANNUAL INSTALLATION & AWARDS BANQUET featured U.S. Chamber Chair Maura Donahue as emcee with special remarks by Sen. Walter Boasso, who led efforts to reform the Levee Boards system. The corresponding Silent Auction raised over \$16,000 for Chamber programs.

The CHAMBER GOLF CLASSIC was held in conjunction with a TEXAS HOLD'EM POKER TOURNEY. Together they raised \$19,413.

The "TICKET TO PARADISE" \$10,000 RAFFLE PARTY found over 500 attendees enjoying live music and food from more than 15 restaurants at the Hawaiian-themed event.

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS continued to be the most popular networking event with more than 150 average attendees. These event sponsorships sell out a year in advance.

LUNCHEONS grew to an average attendance of well over 100 each month. Also well attended were quarterly President's Roundtable issues breakfasts and Mega Marketplace events.

Chamber JAM SESSIONS were held bi-monthly with an average attendance of 50 people, who were introduced to "everything you need to know about the Chamber, jammed into one hour!"

With a focus on retention and more personalized communications, members were invited for coffee and roundtable discussions of issues important to their businesses at bi-monthly MEMBERSHIP PERKS events.

A new series of informal networking sessions called NET CONNECT were created. These members-only events are designed to foster marketing within smaller, more intimate groups of participants who rotate monthly.

St. Tammany West Chamber 2006 ANNUAL REPORT



"If not now, when?"

For its effective organizational procedures and outstanding contribution to positive change in the post-Katrina environment, the St. Tammany West Chamber earned 4-STAR ACCREDITATION from the United States Chamber. It was one of only ten chambers nationwide to achieve this rating, placing it among the top five percent of all chambers in the country.





VOICE OF BUSINESS

POSITIONS

■ Approved a cooperative endeavor contract with Louisiana Economic Development for the Chamber to serve as a regional BUSINESS COUNSELING CENTER

■ Approved a First Planning District Workforce Investment Board contract to create a CENTER FOR WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

■ Called for a ST. TAMMANY APPOINTEE TO SERVE ON THE LOUISIANA RECOVERY AUTHORITY

■ Called for distribution of COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT funds for housing, economic stimulus, workforce development and infrastructure

■ Called for regional CONSOLIDATION OF LEVEE BOARDS system

■ Called for CONSOLIDATION OF ORLEANS PARISH ASSESSORS offices

■ Called for the ADDITION OF LOUISIANA STATE TROOPERS AT TROOP L in order to adequately serve the post-Katrina influx of residents

■ Called for "underserved" designation of ST. TAMMANY'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM in order to receive reimbursement equal to the New Orleans fee schedule

■ Called for LITTER ABATEMENT ENFORCEMENT at the parish level during hurricane recovery

PUBLIC POLICY

Public Policy Division committees hosted the annual PUBLIC POLICY INAUGURAL BREAKFAST to hear from the Northshore's elected officials and determine the Chamber's role in helping them achieve their legislative objectives during 2006.

Chamber leaders traveled to WASHINGTON, D.C. during the U.S. Chamber's Small Business Summit to promote St. Tammany as a parish that is serious about issues impacting its businesses and citizens. Topics discussed with Congressional members and key staffers included infrastructure needs and economic opportunities as well as recovery specific items.

Chamber events throughout the year focused on governmental affairs and legislative issues. U.S. SENATOR MARY LANDRIEU briefed attendees on the outcomes of various legislative recovery initiatives at a spring luncheon held jointly with the Greater Slidell

Area Chamber while U.S. CONGRESSMAN BOBBY JINDAL discussed items expected for debate in the fall session at a President's Roundtable. Luncheon presentations included updates from the LOUISIANA RECOVERY AUTHORITY, members of the grassroots group CITIZENS FOR 1 GREATER NEW ORLEANS and INSURANCE COMMISSIONER JIM DONELON.

A planning and zoning expert was contracted to review parish government's proposed COMPREHENSIVE ZONING ORDINANCE CHANGES. Suggested edits were presented to the parish council for consideration. The consultant's fees were shared by the Chamber and the Greater Slidell Area Chamber.

A President's Roundtable event invited Covington Mayor Candace Watkins and Mandeville Mayor Eddie Price to update members on the STATE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS POST-KATRINA.

INFRASTRUCTURE

As recommended by the Infrastructure Committee, the Board of Directors called for active support of the construction of the proposed LA HIGHWAY 3241. When a handful of property owners' objections to route selection threatened to derail the long-awaited project, the Chamber sent email Public Policy Briefings to its entire membership. Recipients were urged to contact decision makers with the Army Corps of Engineers and LA Department of Transportation and Development, and stress the need for the project, which will provide much-needed traffic relief, an additional hurricane evacuation route and opportunities for economic development.



BUSINESS RECOVERY

With workforce shortage issues paramount for businesses, the BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL and WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE joined forces on several projects, including promotion of a NORTH SHORE JOB FAIR and the co-hosting of a meeting which featured panel discussion among government leaders, contractors and developers who looked at the OBSTACLES FACING THE CONSTRUCTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING for workers in St. Tammany.

Created through a partnership between the Chamber and the First Planning District Workforce Investment Board, the CENTER FOR WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS, with a full time director and staff assistant, is working to address the immediate needs of both employers and job seekers in the tri-parish area of St. Tammany, St. Bernard and Plaquemines. Sessions were held to make employers aware of grant monies available for on-the-job training as well as customized training for jobs in the healthcare, construction, shipbuilding, process technology and hospitality industries.

The Chamber entered a cooperative endeavor with Louisiana Economic Development to serve as a BUSINESS COUNSELING CENTER for long-term business planning post-Katrina. International Economic Development Council volunteers provided free, confidential business counseling. The sessions were designed to assist business owners in understanding the short- and long-term impact to the business environment caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. A total of 58 separate sessions were held.

Communications were amplified Post-Katrina with BUSINESS RECOVERY UPDATES sent as needed in the wake of the storm. The email messages included information on programs and relief efforts to assist with the recovery process. They continued until the anniversary of the storm when regular email communications, which still provide recovery information when appropriate, resumed.

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu greeted over 150 attendees at a luncheon co-hosted by the Chamber, the Greater Slidell Area Chamber and the St. Tammany Economic Development Foundation. She encouraged local businesses to take full advantage of GO ZONE TAX INCENTIVES before they expire.

"The Louisiana Gulf Opportunity Zone Business Guide," published in cooperation with LED, is available in hard copy in the Chamber's lobby and also through the Chamber's website.

The Chamber participated in the NORTHSHORE CONTRACTOR MATCHMAKING EVENT at the Castine Center, which was co-hosted by LED and Southeastern Louisiana University Small Business Development Center. Over 400 contractors and business owners attended the post-Katrina contract procurement event.

The Chamber office housed STAFF FROM THE U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION for several months. Assistance with the loan application process was provided, and applications could be turned in on site.

POST-K STATS

■ 567 - Recovery specific phone call inquiries

■ 556 - Recovery specific walk-in visitors

■ 1,961 - Recovery specific email inquiries

■ 960,391 - Post-Katrina website hits

■ 58 - Post-Katrina business counseling sessions

The Chamber provides assistance to both members and non-members. As of December 2006, the Chamber is comprised of 1,026 MEMBER BUSINESSES, which represent more than 27,000 EMPLOYEES. Over and above those members, there have been 2,280 individuals since September 2005 who've sought recovery resources through the Chamber.

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BUSINESS SUPPORT

The Chamber partnered with Southeastern Louisiana University Small Business Development Center and Louisiana Economic Development to host such seminars as "PREPARING YOUR BUSINESS FOR THE NEXT HURRICANE." Topics included: mitigating risk, types of insurances available, backing up computer systems, addressing employee payroll and other labor issues, creating an overall business recovery plan and more.

A "HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS BY CREATING A BUSINESS STRATEGY, DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN AND SATISFYING YOUR CUSTOMERS" seminar was held to help small business owners create post-Katrina business strategies that focus on customer service and implementing value-added marketing plans. The BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL co-hosted the event with Covington's Downtown Development and SLU SBDC.

The Chamber co-hosted the NORTHSHORE EMPLOYMENT LAW FORUM with the Northshore Region Human Resource Association.

With an influx of new businesses in the region, BAC members helped update "NEW BUSINESS TOOL KITS," which include contact information

for state and local permitting departments, utility companies, licensing bureaus and other agencies.

The BAC also launched the online information program "BIG IDEAS TO HELP SMALL BUSINESSES" on the Chamber's website. Submissions explore such topics as workers' compensation obligations, whistleblower laws and brief summaries of important Gulf Opportunity Zone Act changes.

The 2005 BUSINESS APPRECIATION AWARDS luncheon, postponed by Hurricane Katrina, was held in conjunction with ReEXPO in spring 2006. The 2006 awards were presented at a luncheon in November. In addition to the regular categories several Katrina Bounce Back Awards went to businesses who adjusted and are now thriving.

Nearly 30 prospective business owners received free counseling at the Chamber office through a cooperative endeavor with SLU SBDC.

Members of the HEALTH INSURANCE TASK FORCE are in the process of composing a white paper, which will outline cost-saving opportunities for employee health insurance benefits. Upon completion, it will be disseminated to members and the public.

LEADERSHIP ST. TAMMANY

The Leadership St. Tammany West Foundation Board conducted a fourth annual Leadership Revisited event in March with the theme "Boundaries Blown Away: Regionalism Post-K."

Thirty people graduated from the ongoing nine-month leadership development course, and 32 emerging leaders were chosen for the class of 2007.

Nearly two decades since its inception, the Leadership St. Tammany program formed a 501(c)(3) organization, and became a stand-alone organization in 2006.

ST. TAMMANY HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE

A program born of the Chamber to help address the dire need for more qualified healthcare workers, the St. Tammany Healthcare Alliance, which now includes all major hospitals throughout the parish, launched a CAREERS THAT HEAL initiative in conjunction with Delgado Community College Northshore. Through grant funding, the program paid full tuition for individuals to receive training in such entry-level career areas as CNA, EMT, phlebotomist, unit clerk and dialysis technician. The program was filled to capacity within days of its official start, and a waiting list exists with over 165 prospective students who hope to take part in the tuition-free program during its next enrollment period.