



## THE STRENGTH OF A REGIONAL APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*A summary of the resources available through the  
South Louisiana Economic Council*

The area, known as the Bayou Region, is one of the strongest economic regions in Louisiana, a tribute in large measure to an abundance of natural resources, a productive workforce and progressive approach to economic growth. The parishes of Assumption, Lafourche, St. Mary and Terrebonne are organized into one of eight, economic development regions, recognized by Louisiana Economic Development to be served through one of the eight regional economic development organizations (EDOs) around the state. Since 1984, the South Louisiana Economic Council has been that recognized EDO for the Bayou Region serving the region for more than twenty-four years. This report summarizes the region's long history of regional cooperation and new resources now available to sustain that cooperation for many years to come.

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# THE STRENGTH OF A REGIONAL APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## A summary of the resources available through the South Louisiana Economic Council

The Bayou Region is an amazing place. With one of the greatest concentrations of resources and talents in Louisiana, the Bayou Region routinely takes the top spots in report after report of economically strong regions. Examples abound including a recent report by Loren Scott and Associate's 2008-09 Economic Outlook where the region is described as follows...

*"...THE ENERGY-DEPENDENT MSA IS THE FASTEST GROWING IN THE STATE IN 2007, AND WE SEE THAT DISTINCTION CONTINUING INTO 2008-09 WHEN WE EXPECT THE AREA TO GROW ABOUT 2.7 PERCENT A YEAR..."*<sup>1</sup>

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Or consider the Milken Institute 2007 Best Performing Cities Index that ranks the region 33rd overall nationally, but **number 2 nationally** in job growth from March 06 to March 07 and **number 14 nationally** in 1-year wages and salaries growth out of 179 smaller metro areas.<sup>2</sup>

It is an enviable position to be in by any measure.

Equally as compelling as where we are today, is how we got here. As many businesspersons will recount, there were times when our rankings were far from the top of any list, especially following the wrenching economic downturns of the mid 1980's and in the short but intense periods following the 2005 hits from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Rather, the Bayou Region was viewed as being down for the count with poor prospects of a return. What in fact happened however in both instances was the return of our economy not merely to a point where it was, but at a point well beyond anyone's expectation. In both cases, it was our business that lead the way to recovery through innovation, tenacity and a regional approach to problem solving.

### *1984 – The collapse of the Bayou Region Economy and the Formation of SLEC*

The story of the collapse of the Bayou Region economy will remain etched in the minds of businesses for all time. OPEC sent the price of oil plummeting, effectively collapsing production in the Gulf of Mexico and sending our region into a major tailspin. Unemployment hit double digits, businesses went under and people left the region in droves – many unfortunately never to return. Interestingly enough, it was business people, who came to the conclusion that the best course to set us on a path of recovery and prosperity was a *regional* approach to addressing our issues. Under the collective wisdom of some of the strongest business minds of that time including, Mr. L.J. Folse, Mr. Donald Bollinger, Mr. Jimmie Buquet

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<sup>1</sup> Louisiana Economic Outlook 2009-09, Loren C. Scott and Associates

<sup>2</sup> 2007 Milken Institute Best Performing Cities Index – 179 Small Cities List

and Dr. Ridley Gros, Dean of the College of Business at Nicholls, SLEC was formed with the following goals in mind;

1. That the four parishes of Assumption, Lafourche St. Mary and Terrebonne were logically bound together through our common waterways, culture, economy and connections to the production of oil and gas and that each parish had much more in common than any one had apart.
2. That each parish had the right and obligation to define its own course for economic development BUT many things, just as a matter of common sense, are more efficiently and effectively addresses by pooling resources on a regional basis.
3. That the one place common to each of the four parishes was our regional university, Nicholls State, that while physically located in Lafourche, belonged equally to each parish. By design it was a Geneva where each parish could come to the table as equals and peers.
4. That resource providers at the state and national level were more interested in leveraging their support across a region than duplicating efforts within each parish or fragmenting limited resources so that resources were not sufficient to affect any real outcomes.
5. That business and not government should set the agenda for economic development and that the constituents to be served by SLEC were always to be business above all else.

These goals have stood the test of time – twenty four years to be exact, and have become a model for regional cooperation for the rest of Louisiana. Because of these goals, the Bayou Region and SLEC enjoy a strong reputation around the state as a model of how regional economic development can and should work.

### *Why Regionalism Works*

The founders of SLEC came to the natural conclusion that regionalism should be the foundation for the Bayou Region economy. Since then regionalism has become a standard component of great economies everywhere. Why? Because it works.

Hear what Jim Edmonson, professional site consultant and Senior Vice President with Whittaker Associates, now on assignment in the Bayou Region, has to say about the importance of regionalism to our economy.

“Regional approaches make sense for a number of reasons. Here are our top six.

1. In a global market place communities need identity. Even Atlanta and Dallas, with name recognition rely on the strength of the regional workforce and physical resources to compete. Smaller communities are at a severe disadvantage without power in numbers and identity.
2. Workers travel to jobs and every community needs the support of its neighbor's workforce.
3. The competitive advantages of a single community are amplified when the surrounding community resources are taken into account.

4. Working together as a region saves money through jointly funded marketing efforts versus a going it alone, pay it alone approach. Support from state and federal sources flows much more readily to areas that are organized as a region.
5. Most strong local programs have a close working relationship with their regions.
6. Anecdotal evidence shows a correlation between slower performing communities and the absence of a strong regional approach.

The bottom line? Regionalism works!”

## THE ROLE OF THE SOUTH LOUISIANA ECONOMIC COUNCIL AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THE REGION

### *It's all about the businesses*

The projects and programs of SLEC are, and have always been, broad-based and far reaching. It is not uncommon however to hear that people really don't know what SLEC does. We accept that comment as a natural extension of the work that we do as regional economic developers. The practice of economic development often is, by nature, not something publicized broadly. Business persons trust that confidentiality and keeping a low profile are standard parts of working with an organization like SLEC. It is in fact that trust that gives businesses the confidence to bring open issues into the SLEC environment as a forum for working through needs and opportunities necessary for business growth and success. As it has been from the beginning the focus is on businesses, not government. The results are about them, the businesses, not us the organization. Accordingly a lot of things that happen under our watch are never attributed to our work. That is fine with us since our reward is the successful movement of business, not some award on the wall. This is not to misinterpret our role however as being somehow secretive or intentionally shielded from the public eye. SLEC has always been open to reasonable and productive inquiries about our work and our activity as it relates to providing services to business. SLEC has in fact as a strong record of public audits of our programs and policies to ensure the highest levels of trust and confidence in our work. The role of SLEC is all about business and being good business persons ourselves is important to fulfilling that important role.

With that in mind, please allow us to provide the following insights into the projects and programs available to our region through SLEC.

### *The Role of SLEC*

SLEC is one of eight regional economic development organizations (EDO's) recognized by Louisiana Economic Development (LED) as regional partners in disseminating the programs of that agency on behalf of multi-parish regions. LED is a long-standing partner with SLEC and channels many of their initiatives through SLEC, as they do with the other seven EDOs around the state. Examples of LED/SLEC – partnered programs include; Tier 1 and Tier 2 regional marketing projects, the Small and Emerging Business Development Program administered out of SLEC, the Business Resource Center Network following the 2005 hurricanes and the Technical Assistance Network administered out of SLEC. This model provides an efficient and effective method of getting the most *bang for the buck* in the region. Many of the programs are designed at the state level and arrive with the rules and requirements already in place. Accordingly, SLEC's role becomes to execute what has already been settled.

### *Tier 1 and Tier 2- Regional Awards and Matching Grant Program*

Louisiana Economic Development, in an effort to improve Louisiana's capacity to recruit outside of Louisiana, developed the Tier 1 and 2 Regional Awards and Matching Grants Program. The enabling language of these programs follows verbatim,

#### *1703. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION*

*The Program is designed to provide assistance to eligible economic development organizations in their comprehensive and strategic marketing and/or recruitment plans for towns, cities, parishes and regions as a site for new and/or expanded business development. The program has two objectives:*

- 1) Regional Awards; and 2) Matching Grant Awards.*

In addition, Tier 1 rules are very specific in the requirements as is shown in the language from the grant,

*The Contractor, as the Regional Association, shall produce the following core deliverables as a minimum: A labor survey, (regional funds may also be used to pay for Synchronist use fees), an inventory of Industrial/Commercial buildings, an inventory of Industrial/Commercial building sites, an inventory of Industrial parks with available building sites, a comprehensive existing business and industry report (regional overview, major employers, etc.), a comprehensive feature attraction report, a comprehensive new infrastructure report, and all available annual reports from major institutions within the region (colleges, hospitals, etc.).*

**A review of the following regional resources shows the strong correlation between these requirements and the resources available to the Bayou Region.**

# RESOURCES

## *Community Data – [www.bayouregion.com](http://www.bayouregion.com)*

Extensive community data is presented and updated online at [www.bayouregion.com](http://www.bayouregion.com). The site provides information on incentives, business support programs, workforce, community profiles, business news archives and more. All data and content can be updated in real time without the need for technical staff such as a webmaster. Most information can be printed or exported in a variety of formats. Core data organized under the site includes;

1. Community profiles for Assumption, Lafourche, St. Mary and Terrebonne that include at a minimum; interactive maps, workforce, taxes, employment, transportation, education, quality of life, major events, healthcare, and economic indicators
2. Resources for startup businesses
3. Resources for expanding businesses
4. Resources for business relocation
5. Resources for expansion into international markets
6. Workforce Resources
7. Business Data
8. Post Hurricane Data and Resources
9. SLEC General Information and Annual Board Reports
10. Business News Archives
11. Community Calendar
12. RSS news feeds of developing issues

## *Buildings and Sites Online Database – [www.bayouregionsites.org](http://www.bayouregionsites.org)*

A GIS-enabled buildings and sites database provides extensive data on available locations. Sites are dynamically mapped to show perspective and location and allow for the appending of demographic, workforce, businesses, consumer expenditure data to any site. All information can be printed, e-mailed or rendered in Adobe PDF, MS Word, or MS Excel formats. The service is free and available 24/7/365.

## *Real-time Proposal Management System*

The region is connected by an advanced proposal management system to allow for real-time collaboration among each of the four parishes for rapid responses to site consultant RFPs. Information is returned via e-mail with options to print a complete, formatted proposal from the recipient's desktop. Companies are provided a unique proposal code that can be used to access their proposal through [www.bayouregion.com](http://www.bayouregion.com). The Proposal Management System is actively managed by professional site consultant staff.

### *Online Web Meeting Tools*

The Bayou Region offers online meeting tools to allow for virtual meetings with as many as ten participants per meeting utilizing WebEx meeting center tools. Anything from documents, to Power Points to video or live webcam images can be viewed and shared in real time without the need for a physical meeting. The tools allow for the elimination of time and space to make it easier for companies considering relocation to the Bayou Region to evaluate our region.

### *Workforce Development*

SLEC is the regional intermediary the transportation segment of a Recovery Workforce Training Program for the Bayou Region. The program focuses in recruitment, placement, training and retention of workers in the maritime and trucking industries and operates in cooperation with the Louisiana Workforce Commission and in conjunction with L.E. Fletcher Community College, Louisiana Technical College – Thibodaux and Louisiana Community College – Young Memorial, Morgan City, as well as other private training providers. The goal is the restoration of workers to critical industries through local and national recruiting.

### *Jobs Portal – [www.bayouregionjobs.com](http://www.bayouregionjobs.com) (available May 2008)*

An resource of will soon be available to provide online access to jobs, training and placement support for the region. The portal is actively managed by workforce specialists with the South Louisiana Economic Council.

### *Bayou Region Explorer (available May 2008)*

The Bayou Region Explorer provides a self-guided virtual tour of the region, each parish and each community within each parish including images, descriptions and links to additional resources. The Explorer can be accessed via web browser or can be received via portable media such as flash drives or CDs.

### *Tradeshow Booth*

A professionally designed tradeshow booth is available for loan to any parish or entity in promotion of the area. The booth utilizes the Bayou Region branding but leaves the two side panels open for specific branding or messaging of any organization.

### *Synchronist Business Retention Program*

Synchronist is a systematic, business calling program backed up by analytical and predictive software designed to identify companies at risk of relocating out of the region. The program is endorsed and recommended by Louisiana Economic Development and is successfully in place in a number of communities throughout Louisiana.

### *Whittaker Associates Targeted Lead Project*

Whittaker and Associates is a nationally-known site selection consulting firm that has been retained to develop a targeted lead list of companies that have characteristics that indicate a possible relocation to the southeast United States. Whittaker will develop a list of 200 leads that will be actively managed to encourage their consideration of the Bayou Region as a site for their relocation. Leads are managed under confidentiality through a memorandum of understanding between SLEC and all participating parishes.

### *Edmonson Associates*

Professional site selection consultant, Jim Edmonson, has been retained to actively manage the leads generated through the Whittaker project as well as other leads generated through other avenues of marketing and outreach. Leads will be managed and distributed to the local economic development agencies under the guidance of a mutually executed memorandum of understanding.

### *Monthly Leads Management Meetings*

Meetings are held monthly to provide a forum for the review of leads and projects among the Bayou Region economic developers.

### *Small and Emerging Business Development*

The Small and Emerging Business Development Program is an innovative and effective program that provides up to a 50% match to small businesses for projects ranging from the setup of accounting systems, website development, marketing or specialized training. The program is very flexible and accepts nearly any worthwhile project for consideration. Certification is required but acceptance is very open and inclusive. The program is administered regionally through SLEC.

### *Small Business Development Center*

The Louisiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) provides assessment, counseling, training and referral service for small businesses in the Bayou Region. The SBDC is housed at SLEC.

### *Technical Assistance Network*

Funded through the Louisiana Department of Economic Development, the Technical Assistance Network is designed to offer long-term, intensive technical assistance support to small businesses, entrepreneurs, and non-profit organizations in eligible parishes affected by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. To be eligible for technical assistance businesses must reside in: Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, Vermilion, Acadia, Allen, Beauregard, Iberia, Jefferson Davis, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Mary, Tangipahoa, Terrebonne, or Washington parishes.

### *Entrepreneur Training Series*

The Entrepreneur Training Series is ten-week program that provides insights in the process of starting and operating a small business. Utilizing the materials and systems of the Kaufman Foundation, FastTrac series, entrepreneurs meet weekly for 2 ½ hour sessions for learning, networking and connecting with resources. Nearly 200 companies have completed the training to date.

### *International Trade Development*

The South Louisiana Economic Council retains specialists in the development of international markets for Bayou Region companies. The current focus is on the development of new trade initiatives with the Republic of Kazakhstan, a free and democratic nation with favorable U.S. relations and oil reserves on par with those of Kuwait. Several reciprocal trade missions have

been successfully completed with new business development planned for the coming months.

### *USDA Rural Economic Development Initiative*

Through the support of the USDA, small business counseling and training is being made available within St. Mary and Assumption Parishes. Support will center on expanding the reach of entrepreneurial training in each parish coupled with additional counseling for small businesses.

### *Bayou Region Small Business Incubator*

The region's first small business incubator is set to open at 629 East First Street in Thibodaux. The facility will provide office space for up to eight new companies including shared clerical and office support. The first tenant is expected to move in before the end of March 2008.

### *Infrastructure Report (available May 2008)*

The presence of infrastructure improvements are a key indicator of an economy on the move. An initial inventory of infrastructure projects is being developed and will be maintained on a regular schedule thereafter. The report will be available online at [www.bayouregion.com](http://www.bayouregion.com)

### *Louisiana Legislative Loop (available May 2008)*

Louisiana Legislative Loop is a program to connect business with legislators through an online surveys and dissemination of information concerning legislative activities.

### *Bayou Region Business Barometer Report (available May 2008)*

A monthly report of key economic indicators for the Bayou Region, news and developments of interest to the region.

### *Business Research Service*

While extensive business research and data is available online at [www.bayouregion.com](http://www.bayouregion.com), SLEC also maintains resources to conduct ad hoc business research on behalf of the region.

### *Louisiana Business and Technology Center*

The Louisiana Business and Technology Center is one of the state's premier resources for business support and assistance. LBTC is staffed with research, business planning, business counseling and training staff and is also the home to the Small Business Innovation Technology grant program. The LBTC also managed a mobile classroom that has been deployed in the Bayou Region on a number of occasions. LBTC participates through a cooperative agreement with SLEC to bring their resources into the Bayou Region.

### *Nicholls State University/ College of Business*

SLEC and Nicholls State University operate under a cooperative endeavor agreement to share facilities, resources and talent. SLEC is housed at Nicholls and enjoys a strong working relationship with the university and especially with the College of Business.

### *MePOL*

The Manufacturing Extension Partnership of Louisiana provides support to Louisiana manufacturers in the form of process improvement, management, technology and other services. MePOL works in cooperation with SLEC in its outreach to Bayou Region manufactures.

### *PTAC*

The Procurement Technical Assistance Center provides direct assistance to companies in acquiring government contracts. Companies listed with PTAC receive daily e-mails with available government contracting opportunities. PTAC also assists companies in completing necessary steps for listing their company for doing business with the government. PTAC operates out of the SLEC facilities.

## ECONOMIC PROFESSIONALS CONTACTS

The Bayou Region benefits from a concentration of highly dedicated, highly professional local economic development professionals. SLEC actively engages with each local economic developer to ensure that the goals and objectives of each are reflected in the work on behalf of the region. Each can readily draw upon the resources of the region for local or regional projects and can look to SLEC to support localized efforts in economic development.

### *Regional*

South Louisiana Economic Council – Vic Lafont, President and CEO – 985-448-4485, vic.lafont@nicholls.edu or online at [www.bayouregion.com](http://www.bayouregion.com)

SLEC also retains the services of site selection consultants, Edmonson and Associates for assistance with responses to RFPs and general guidance in identifying properties and resources.

### *Parishes*

Assumption Parish – Booster Breaux , Assumption Police Jury Economic Development Committee Chair – (985) 369-7435, or online at [www.assumptionla.com](http://www.assumptionla.com)

Lafourche Parish – Gretchen Caillouet, Director of Grants and Economic Development - (985) 446-8427, ext 241- CaillouetGM@lafourchegov.org or online at [www.lafourchegov.org](http://www.lafourchegov.org)

St. Mary Parish – Frank Fink, Director of Economic Development - (337) 828-4100 ext 340, ffink@parish.st-mary.la.us or online at [www.parish.st-mary.la.us](http://www.parish.st-mary.la.us)

Terrebonne Parish – Michael Ferdinand - (985) 873-6890 or online at [www.tepda.org](http://www.tepda.org)

### *Industry*

Entergy- Bill Peperone - (504) 840-2562 - vpepero@entergy.com

# CONTACTS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

## *Contact Information*

South Louisiana Economic Council  
2048- NSU  
310 Ardoyne Drive – SLEC Building  
Nicholls State University  
Thibodaux, Louisiana 70310

Vic Lafont, President and CEO  
Phone: 985-448-4485  
Fax: 985-448-4486

## *Main Web Portal*

[www.bayouregion.com](http://www.bayouregion.com)

## *Buildings and Sites Web Portal*

[www.bayouregionsites.com](http://www.bayouregionsites.com) (also accessible through [www.bayouregon.com](http://www.bayouregon.com))

## *Jobs Portal*

[www.bayouregionjobs.com](http://www.bayouregionjobs.com) (also accessible through [www.bayouregon.com](http://www.bayouregon.com))

## *Program Contacts*

Small and Emerging Business Development Program  
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Workforce Development  
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Industrial Recruitment and Site Selection  
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