



Everything New Orleans

The Times-Picayune

Sunday, February 01, 2009

Chamber Connections

Investing in education

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By Tom Meyer

Contributing writer

At a post-Katrina forum about community issues, a panel focused on quality of life trends in Jefferson Parish. As a result of further study, the Jefferson Parish Economic Development Commission -- JEDCO -- addressed the crime rate, financing for flood protection and drainage, education improvement and health care infrastructure.

As progress continues toward addressing these issues, an educational opportunity emerged recently as construction of the Huey P. Long Bridge foreshadowed enhanced access to and from the Westbank.

"It is time to invest substantively in education," said Lucien Gunter, JEDCO's executive director, at a recent meeting of business leaders about plans for a new science and technology academy.

Referring to the Education Strategic Implementation Plan (2008), Gunter added that "there has been positive academic progress under the leadership of the superintendent. We can now make a long-term investment in a new school that will serve the employment and career goals our markets need."

Patrick F. Taylor Science and Technology Academy is in its third year of operation. The school is slated to move to new facilities at Churchill Technology and Business Park in Avondale. Site preparation is largely completed and new buildings, including conference and multi-purpose centers, are targeted for use by the fall of 2011.

"We should do all we can to make it happen as planned," said Glenn Hayes, Jefferson Parish chamber executive director. "The school demonstrates success in qualifying young people for employment, college and career choices. I'm sure this will be demonstrated when the first graduating class showcases Senior Project results and when college placements for these 27 outstanding graduates are announced."

"Taylor is one step towards fulfillment of the strategic plan," added Woody Oge, Jefferson Business Council vice chair and the Northrop-Grumman Avondale site director. "The learning methods are recommended by the Louisiana High School Reform Task Force."

Citing an updated "three R" concept -- rigor, relevance and relationship -- Oge said that "Taylor is applying the rigor, is making course work relevant and is demonstrating productive relationships with area businesses."

Making the case for business-education partnerships, Diane Roussel, superintendent of Jefferson Parish Public School, reported fiscal 2008 results at a school board meeting last month at which a financial commitment for Taylor Academy was approved.

"The state, parish and school board have invested millions towards making the science and technology magnet a reality," Roussel said. "As always, our open records approach to financial disclosure will make it apparent to the community that regional investment is vital towards building a well-equipped facility."

"Financial partnership by chamber and business association members will leave no doubt that we are on the brink of educational excellence on an entirely new level."

For more information, go to the JEDCO website at www.jedco.org or call Al Doeve 504.736.1843 or Jeff Nowakowski at 504.349.7979. Both are with Jefferson Parish public schools.

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Tom Meyer is the chair of the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce. E-mail him at tom@benefitplanninggroup.net.