

@HEALTH & WELL-BEING ISSUE

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FOCUS: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

THE BIG PICTURE



Central Louisiana businesses helping other area businesses to become better businesses. That's the basic idea behind Cenla Advantage Partnership, (CAP), a major economic effort funded in part by The Rapides Foundation and a first of its kind in our region.

Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation, is upbeat about its progress as CAP completes its first full year of operation. "I'm excited to see CAP up and running with such vigor. It's just so encouraging to watch as CAP becomes an independent nonprofit organization equipped to essentially reshape the economic climate in all of Central Louisiana."

(continued on page 2)

Where CAP stands today

THE BIG PICTURE

A Little History

CAP's evolution can be traced to a meeting in April 2003 called *Common Ground, Higher Ground*. "The Foundation had been approached again and again by many of our grant-seekers who felt there was a need to explore economic development in the region," Rosier said. "That conference was our response. We also hired two outside consultants who conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with community leaders and researched economic development groups in other parts of the country."

From there, a nine-member steering committee was formed. Chaired by Rod Noles, President of Noles-Frye Realty, the committee began laying the groundwork for Cenla Advantage Partnership as well as lining up investors. The Rapides Foundation made a three-year commitment to CAP totaling \$1.5 million to be used as matching funds for each private investment made to CAP. "That's a potential \$3 million that will be dedicated to strengthening our area economy," Rosier said.

After the steering committee completed its work, an 18-member board of directors was named in 2005 and set out to get CAP from the drawing board to reality, with definite goals and strategies to improve the area's economy.

"This is all about business," said Mike Madison, President and CEO of Cleco Corporation and Chairman of CAP's Board of Directors. "CAP represents the investment of private business. It's not coming from any political organization. And it's all for this region."

George Robertson Hired

A major first step by the CAP board was to begin a national search for a chief executive officer, someone with the business savvy to make CAP a viable economic entity.

George Robertson was the man they chose, signing him on as CAP's first president in March 2006. "CAP is a not-for-profit economic organization whose focus is a little bit different than people would think of when you say 'economic development group,'" Robertson said. "Our measure of success would not be whether the region gets more jobs, but whether the region



George Robertson was chosen to lead CAP following a national search.

"I think one of CAP's greatest strengths is being able to facilitate or coordinate so that everybody's working together."

Mike Madison

President and CEO of Cleco Corporation and Chairman of CAP's Board of Directors

Where CAP stands today

gets better jobs. We want to see our average per capita income going up.”

To achieve that goal, CAP will be reaching out to other agencies. “I think it’s clear to say that one of CAP’s goals is to serve as a hub to bring groups together for collaborative efforts,” he said.

Madison agreed. “I think one of CAP’s greatest strengths is being able to facilitate or coordinate so that everybody’s working together. It’s amazing how George has brought so many organizations together since he’s been here. Before, none of us were talking together, and now we’re all sitting down at the same table. That’s huge in my opinion. That’s tremendous.”


Eleven-Parish Area

There are many economic groups in Central Louisiana, but none on the scale and with the scope of CAP, which will serve an 11-parish area, adding Sabine and Concordia parishes to The Rapides Foundation’s usual nine-parish service area of Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn.

“What it gives us, and it’s already proving true, is the ability to look at the big picture,” Robertson said. It is a big picture that showed the need for CAP to commit itself to a two-fold focus of encouraging entrepreneurship as well as helping existing business to prosper and grow. Instead of going out and spending considerable time and effort trying to attract new large-scale business from outside our area, CAP will concentrate on helping businesses that are already here. “Our orientation is based on the fact that 70 percent of all new jobs in America are created by companies you’ve already got,” said Robertson, adding, “That’s really how we create jobs in America – two or three at a time. Not a thousand at a time or a hundred, but two or three.”

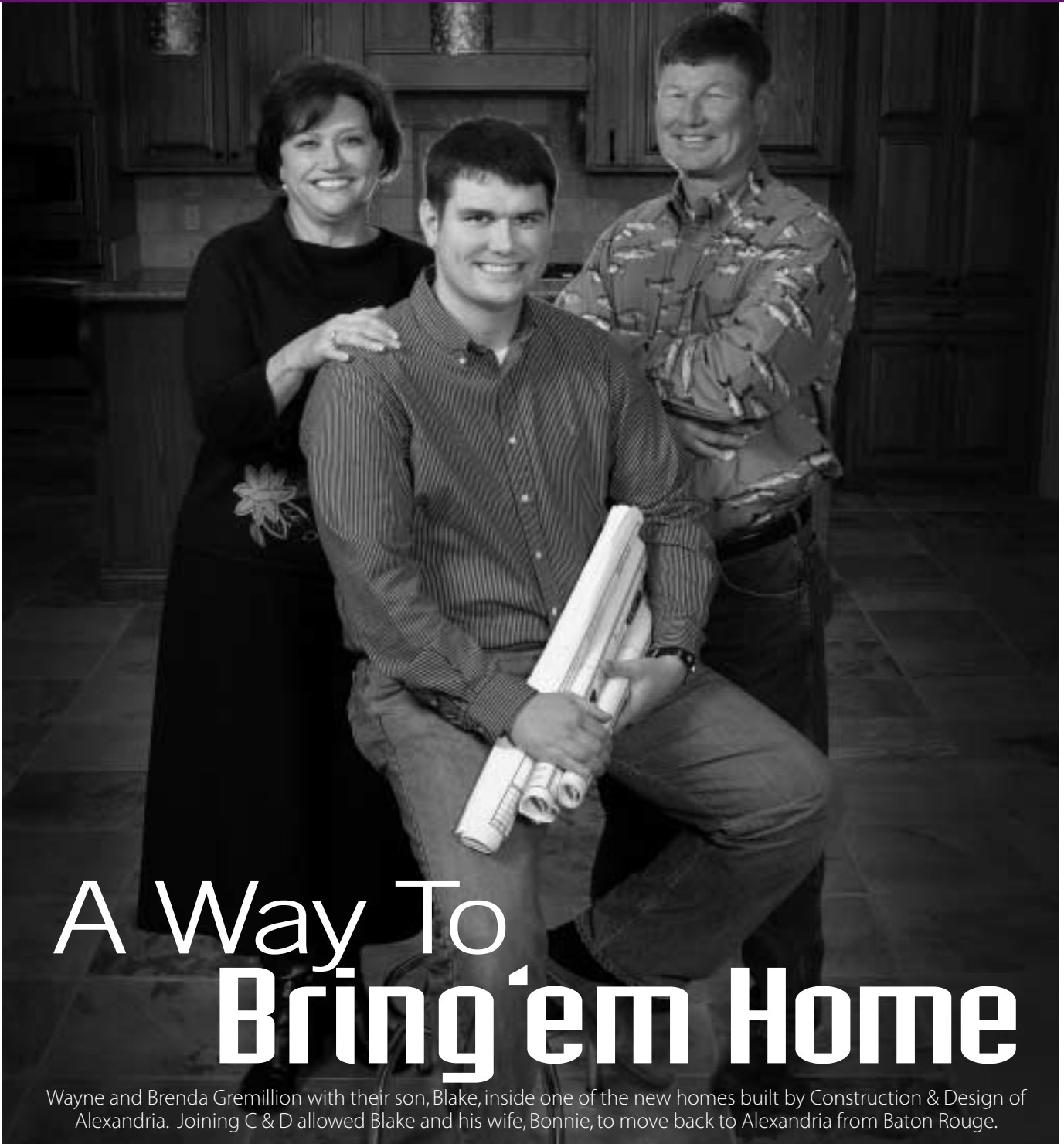
The First Steps

Cenla Advantage Partnership is just beginning to take on the economic challenges that face us, but it represents a major investment in the future of Central Louisiana and its residents. “We’re a long ways from being where we ought to be, but we’re further along than we were before CAP was there,” Madison said.

It is indeed a difficult challenge we face, but with the entrance of CAP, our economic future is looking brighter. 



Bring 'em Home



A Way To Bring 'em Home

Wayne and Brenda Gremillion with their son, Blake, inside one of the new homes built by Construction & Design of Alexandria. Joining C & D allowed Blake and his wife, Bonnie, to move back to Alexandria from Baton Rouge.

The scene has been played out time and again in families all across Central Louisiana. A tearful mom bustles about, making sure everything is packed and nothing has been forgotten while the dad gives out last-minute advice and a few extra bucks, "just in case," as their son or daughter prepares to go off to college. What brings true melancholy to the scene is the fact that many of these young, energetic and bright college-bound students never return to their hometowns except for visits, choosing instead the bright lights of the larger cities and the many career possibilities available. Those young adults who would like to come back have felt there were simply no good jobs or opportunities to come back to.



It's enough to sadden the heart of any mom. "Your children are your life," said Brenda Gremillion, an Alexandria mother of two grown sons. "They just mean so very, very much to us. That's what we had them for, to love and to nourish and teach them to grow wings and expand But to come home," she added with a glint of humor. "Me, being a mother and a grandmother, I just want to make my little nest and bring my little chicks home."

Well, Cenla Advantage Partnership has begun a campaign to help moms lure their far-flung adult children back to the nest. It's called "Bring 'em Home Cenla" and carries the fitting line, "There's a job for you here. Love, Mom." The idea is to publicize through advertisements and mail-outs a listing of the many job opportunities, along with the salaries, that are available in our communities. Moms will do the rest. The campaign is geared toward mothers, but it is

obviously designed to be used by anyone who wants to encourage a friend or relative to move back to the area.

CAP President George Robertson said it is important to the growth of our region to encourage those who have left our area for "the big city" to return home. "We go back to the number one issue of business in America which is skilled workforce. That's the number one issue for businesses in Central Louisiana. Now one of the ways to get skilled workforce is to get skilled people to move in. Obviously the most logical ones to move here are those who left."

And there's another very important reason to bring back those who left. "It's not a good idea for a community, society or culture to have a serious out-migration of its young people," said Robertson. "It's not healthy for our future. So, bringing them back becomes an essential part of a healthy community."

"My wife and I knew we wanted to come back home.
We're from here."

Blake Gremillion, Construction & Design of Alexandria

Bring 'em Home

Bring 'em Home Cenla

Brenda Gremillion is one of the lucky mothers; both her sons live nearby. But less than a year ago that wasn't the case. Like so many parents have done before them, Brenda and her husband, Wayne, watched their younger son Blake head off to Baton Rouge to get a degree in industrial engineering at Louisiana State University. While still in college he got a job with a Baton Rouge engineering firm that began opening up opportunities for him. After graduation, he stayed with the firm, and the work and the opportunities only got better.

But things changed. Blake married in January 2006 and then an opportunity opened up with an old friend from Alexandria who owned a construction company and was looking to expand. He wanted Blake to move back to Alexandria and join him in his enterprise. "My wife and I knew we wanted to come back home," Blake said. "We're from here. We had set a goal that from the time we were married, we would start looking to come home in three years, and then no later than five years we would like to move back." But that timeline altered drastically and by July he and his wife, Bonnie, were back home.

Needless to say, his mother is ecstatic. "Well, it's absolutely wonderful. Of course, Blake is kind of a home boy; he likes his family and friends here in Alexandria. He was just tickled to death to come home. And Bonnie is from near Cheneyville, so it was a great decision."

Blake said he's home to stay. "The best part, besides being with the family and being close to friends, is just to know that the town that I was raised in, the place where I started, will hopefully be the place I finish."

Both Brenda and her son Blake said they know of many young people who would like to

“Now one of the ways to get skilled workforce is to get skilled people to move in. Obviously the most logical ones to move here are those who left.”

George Robertson, CAP President

Bring 'em Home



Brian Trahan (left), general manager of the Leesville Daily Leader, works with staff photographer Will Tubbs.

come back to the area, so they like the idea behind the “Bring ‘em Home Cenla” campaign. “Bringing the younger people back gives us new ideas, new hope, new industry, new everything,” said Brenda. “I think it’s really important that these young people come together and come back home and build Alexandria to what it can be.”

In Vernon Parish, Brian Trahan, general manager of the Leesville Daily Leader, also supports the “Bring ‘em Home Cenla” concept. “I think it’s outstanding and I think it’s overdue. I agree that in order for us to flourish, to build a future for Central Louisiana, we need the younger generation to come back.”

Trahan sees “Bring em Home Cenla” from a personal perspective as well. He grew up in Jennings and after high school worked in the oilfields in South Louisiana for about five years. He then went to college and got his journalism degree from Louisiana Tech in Ruston. He returned to Jennings after college and stayed for over six years but then he left the state and decided to pursue a career opportunity in South Padre Island on the Texas-Mexico border. Trahan

stayed a couple of years and moved farther west to Phoenix, Ariz., where he did freelance writing for newspapers and magazines. But after a year or so, he needed a change.

“I just wanted to come home. I missed Louisiana and the people and my family,” he said. Two newspaper jobs opened up for him – one in the mountains of Arizona, the other in Leesville. He chose to return to Louisiana. “If you thrive on friends and family and getting a chance to know people and contribute to a community, this is the perfect place because of Louisiana’s culture and because of the way people accept you,” he said. “I wouldn’t have it any other way. I wouldn’t go back to city life. It wasn’t for me.”

CAP believes that there are many Blakes and Brians out there who may have moved away but have left their hearts in Central Louisiana. It wants to reach out to them, along with their mothers, and bring ‘em home. Our future will be all the more promising because of it. And moms will be much happier.



Cop to CAP



George Robertson, CAP President and CEO

From cop to CAP

A leader with a wealth of experience

“My first job was a cop,”

George Robertson said with a laugh as he talked about the diverse career path that led him from his hometown of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to Alexandria, Louisiana, and the position of president of Cenla Advantage Partnership. “Yes, a police officer,” he continued, knowing what an unlikely beginning it seems for someone who ended up an economic developer. But it’s exactly that scope of experience that made him the right man to head CAP.

“Like many people of my generation I literally switched jobs or careers every three or four years,” he said. “What that gave me was a very broad background, and as it turns out economic development is a very broad business. Economic development is truly one of the most general businesses of today; where you’ve got to know a little bit about everything. So it actually ended up being a pretty good training ground.”

That “pretty good training ground” included heading up a not-for-profit safety organization and a stint as a loss control engineer for an insurance company in El Paso. Robertson was

also a site selection consultant for several Fortune 500 companies and the Director of Economic Development for the Governor of South Dakota. He owned five small businesses which included a radio station, an advertising agency, and a research firm; a feat which he vigorously affirmed, “gives you a perspective you can’t replicate.”

Prior to coming to Alexandria, he spent 20 years in Northeast New York State as President of the Schenectady Economic Development Corporation. It was then that Robertson witnessed an amazing upheaval in the business climate. “I think that it was a fascinating experience because I went through the incredible transition that the Northeast is going through, that the South is going to go through, and in some places already is.” It was an experience that he said is already being used to help our area.

“In Schenectady we had to get really good at keeping the businesses we had, helping them to expand, and doing a lot of start-up and entrepreneurship with them. And those two program areas are the two focuses of CAP.”

Cop to CAP

From cop to CAP

For many years Robertson has been active in professional training for other economic developers for such institutions as the University of Oklahoma's Economic Development Institute, the New England Economic Development Course, the Kentucky Economic Development Course and the New Hampshire Economic Development Academy. In addition, he spent three weeks in eastern Hungary advising local elected officials on creating economic development programs in a post-socialistic economy. He recently did some economic development work in Mexico. He is also a national speaker on the subject of future trends and economic development.

Robertson likes the traveling. "It keeps you fresh. If you keep going out and exchanging information and seeing new areas, you get new ideas."

And that gives you a pretty good idea of why George Robertson was eagerly sought to head the CAP effort. "They often say that a successful economic developer has to be a master multi-tasker," he said, "which is, you have to have the ability to constantly see the big picture, be a visionary about where you're taking the big picture and have the technical skills to do all the little things that have to be done."

Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation, believes Robertson has what it takes to produce positive change in Central Louisiana. "George has impressed everyone with his breadth of knowledge and professional experience. His credentials are so diverse that he can take on a challenge and view it from many aspects. It's that 'multi-vision' that makes him such an asset for CAP."

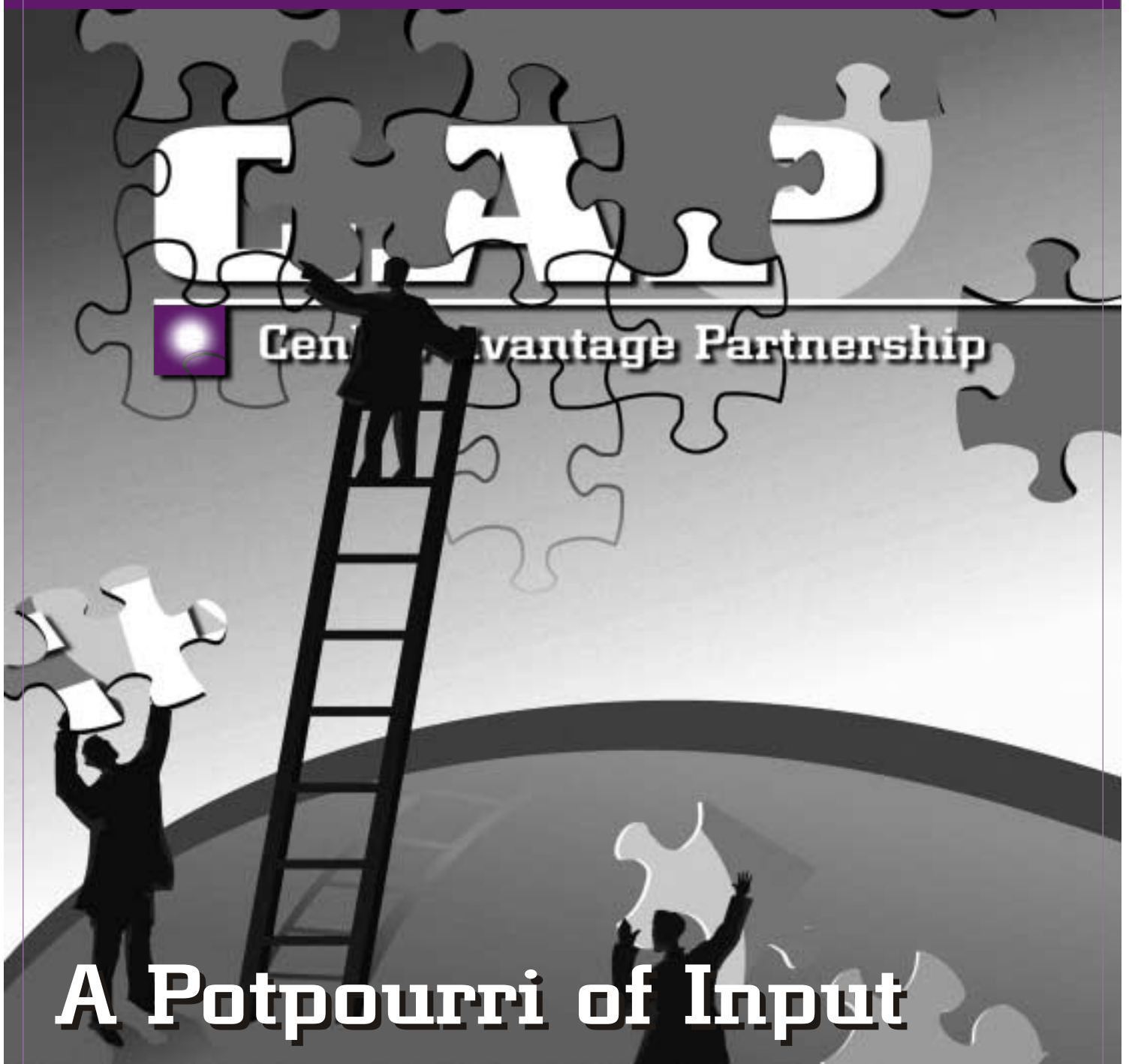
It's obvious that George Robertson is the right man for CAP, but why is CAP the right job for him? Robertson said the answer to that is that he was ready for a change and Louisiana seemed just the place for two reasons. The first involved a visit to Toledo Bend more than two years ago to be the keynote speaker at an economic development summit for Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana. "Louisiana, other than New Orleans, I didn't really know existed until I came to that summit. And I liked it."

His second reason? "It was the post-Katrina era and it was a chance to help a state's economy come back," Robertson answered. "I mean, no state's economy has taken the kind of economic hit that Katrina/Rita caused in Louisiana. So, not only is it a new place for me, it's an incredible career challenge."

George Robertson is right for CAP, and CAP is right for George Robertson. Either way you look at it, it's a winning combination for the economic future of Central Louisiana. 

"Economic development is truly one of the most general businesses of today; where you've got to know a little bit about everything."

George Robertson, CAP President



A Potpourri of Input

Centra Advantage Partnership is governed by a 19-member board made up of business people and community leaders throughout its 11-parish service area. The idea was to get a mix of people with different perspectives of business but with the same goal of creating economic prosperity for the entire region.

Take for example the board's vice-chairman, Blake Chatelain, President and CEO of Red River Bank – one of those businesses which have made sizeable monetary contributions to CAP. He wanted to serve on the board because, "I just saw this as one of the best opportunities that I could have to help create an organization that we haven't had, that will make a wonderful difference in this community.

(continued on page 22)

CAP Board

CAP



Cenla Advantage Partnership / Board Members



(Front l-r) Brent Scallan, Scallan Contractors; Buddy Tudor, Tudor Companies; Glenda Stock, McDonald's of Alexandria; Horatio Isadore, H & I, Inc.; Mike Madison, Cleco; Ken Hughes, Merchants and Farmers Bank; A.C. Buchanan, Rapides Regional Medical Center; Horace Austin, North Rapides Business and Industry Alliance; Blake Chatelain, Red River Bank; and Todd Leleux, Noble Flight.

CAP Board



(Back l-r) Joe Cunningham, Jr., Cunningham Financial Group; Dorothy Oliver, LaSalle Community Action Assn.; Charlie Baker, Procter & Gamble; Lance Harris, Lance Harris Companies; Caroline Theus, Keller Enterprises; Kelly Rush Williams, The Rush Companies; Roy O. Martin, III, Roy O. Martin Lumber Co., LLC; Kyle Wolff, State Farm Insurance; and Teddy Price, Central Management Company.

Workforce Profiling and Assessment

WANTED: The Right Person



Bonnie Jones (left), job profiler and Johnie Varnado (right), Director of Kazette Enterprises, help Shane Sylvester with a skills assessment program during a recent CAP employment evaluation at Louisiana Works in Alexandria.

for the Right Job

A major part of the mission of Cenla Advantage Partnership is the retention and expansion of existing business. To begin to achieve this massive goal, CAP has launched two separate projects in the last few months. The first is “Bring ‘em Home Cenla” (see Page 4), and the other is the first phase of an effort to profile and assess the region’s workforce. CAP wants to profile what jobs are out there and then assess the skills and talents of employees. From there it becomes possible to match the right person to the right job.

Matching the right person to the right job is the passion of Johnie Varnado. Her company of 21 years, Kazette Enterprises, has taken on this first, experimental, five-month pilot phase of CAP’s program. “What has me most encouraged is that they’re working with the smaller employers and they’re working from a regional standpoint. So, that excites me because we’re helping local folks, local employers, small employers to grow and develop their businesses.”

CAP chose the construction industry to begin the job profiling process. Hundreds of surveys were sent out to area businesses. Owners answered such questions as: What positions do you have that are hard to fill? How many employees do you have? How many new hires have you made in the last 12 months? As the surveys have been returning, CAP has been selecting a percentage of those surveys and sending them to Kazette Enterprises for job

profiling. The information they gather will be entered into a database.

Bonnie Jones is the job profiler. She has almost 30 years of experience as a vocational evaluator and is a national trainer. She begins with a visit to the company to ascertain their job titles and to find out which ones they have trouble filling. “Most companies do not have job descriptions, so they have a hard time hiring because they don’t know what they’re hiring for. They don’t really know what it takes in terms of aptitudes and the general educational development levels to do a job. And that’s true of lots and lots of industries,” Jones said.

“In the construction industry, for instance, construction companies advertise for ‘common laborers’ and you say, ‘What is that?’ So I go in and try to find out what they mean by common laborer and then I come back and apply to that job a standard title and description and a profile for the job,” she said. Her information comes from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Dictionary of Occupational Titles, and it serves as a guide to help employers understand what a particular job entails in terms of not only education, but aptitudes and temperament as well.

From there, she and the company will customize the job description to better suit what additional duties the company might need in an employee to perform in that position. Jones said job profiling helps the company in four ways. “It’s increasing a company’s productivity, reducing training time, reducing absenteeism and reducing turnover.”

Workforce Profiling and Assessment

WANTED: The Right Person


It works for Todd Urbina. As co-owner of Progressive Construction Co., Urbina sees the benefit of workforce needs assessment and profiling in Central Louisiana. He and Ricky Crews have 115 employees working in their 12-year-old construction business, but they sometimes have trouble filling open positions with qualified employees. "We struggle to find operators and foremen, and they are going to help us in that quest," Urbina said.

He has been working with Jones for over a month and has already seen results. They are developing new job descriptions and getting assistance in hiring people who have the ability to learn. He applauds Cenla Advantage Partnership for taking the lead in helping existing businesses in the area. "It's nice to see an organization that is trying to help make a difference," he said.

Varnado said what employers like Progressive Construction Co. are discovering is that they need to look beyond the formal education and skills level of potential employees. "It's more

about talent than it is skills. I want everybody to have great skills, that all helps, but you've got to have that passion first."

Varnado said along with the job profiling will eventually come an employee assessment tool to measure the skills and talents of the area's workforce. "We can assess someone's skill levels, we'll assess their aptitudes and we'll assess their temperament." The assessment will print out a profile of the job and the profile of the individual being assessed. "So, we now can match that person factor for factor, saying that this person is perfectly matched for this job or it will indicate this person has a deficiency."

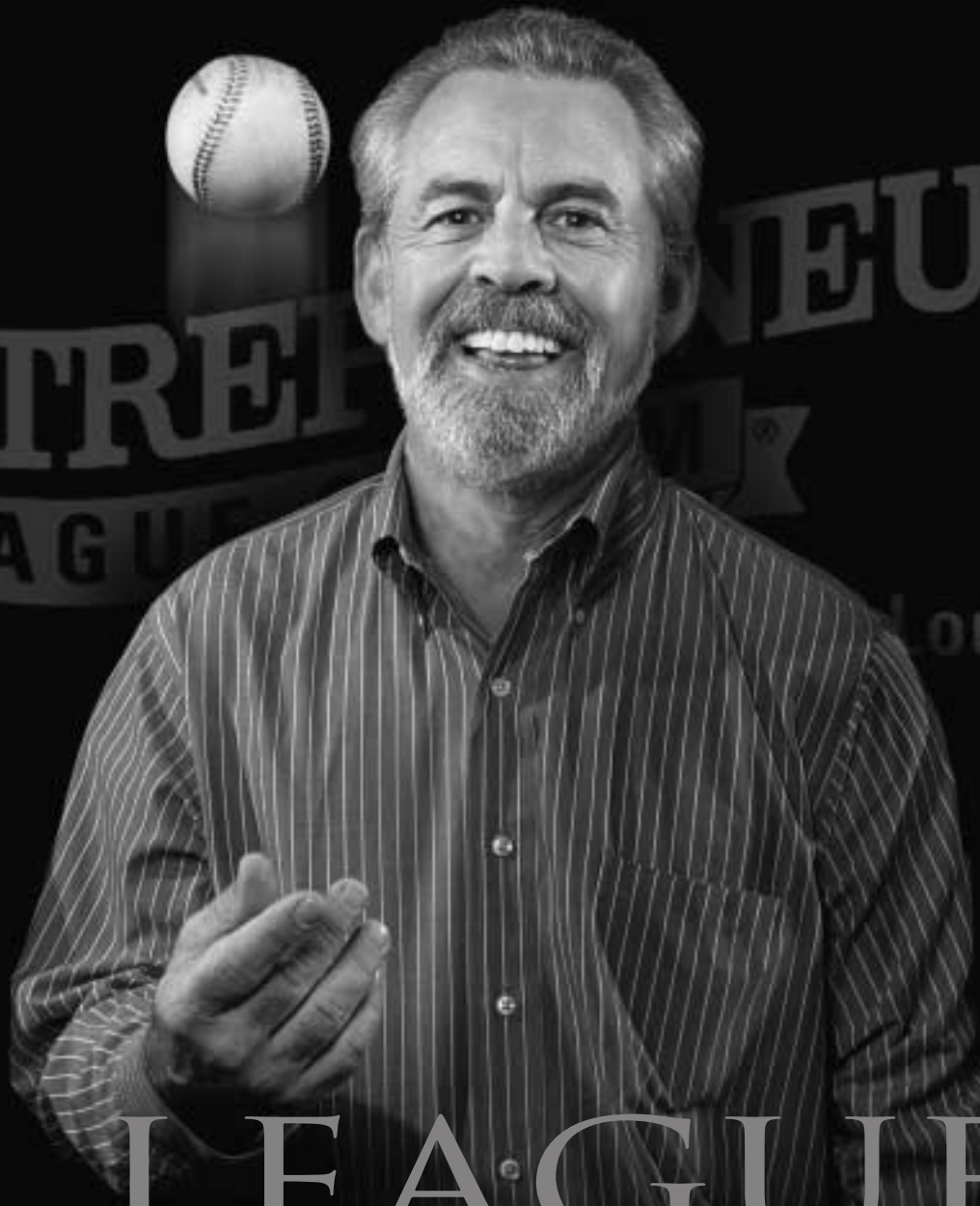
A profiling and assessment program benefits both the employer and the employee, which in turn strengthens the overall workforce in Central Louisiana. Employers will know what kind of person they need to fill a position and the employees will know what type of employment is best for them. "Whatever industry you're in, we have to hire passionate workers – those people who have talent and the ability to do the work," Varnado said. "Match that with the skills, and we have a win-win workforce." 



**"It's nice to see
an organization
that is trying to
help make a
difference."**

Todd Urbina, Co-owner of Progressive Construction Co., talks with heavy-equipment operator Cynthia Williams at a job site near Coca-Cola Bottling Company in Alexandria.

Entrepreneurial League System



A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

Keith Rabalais, General Manager of The Entrepreneurial League System® of Central Louisiana.

Baseball is the inspiration behind an economic initiative of The Rapides Foundation called the Entrepreneurial League System® of Central Louisiana. Its creator, Dr. Gregg A. Lichtenstein, a nationally known specialist in entrepreneurship, modeled the ELS after the farm system of professional sports, which he considers to be one of the most successful processes in the world for developing talent.

Entrepreneurial League System

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN



Coach Edwin Caplan works with entrepreneur Carol Ulmer.

Entrepreneurial League System



Baseball leagues give the sport the opportunity to recruit potentially very good players and then give them much-needed coaching so they can gain experience and expertise. It allows players to move up to the majors when they are able to meet the rigors of the game. The baseball league system also allows players already in the majors a chance to refocus and get back on track when their game is off and they need some help to overcome their obstacles. The end result is a strong team with many trained and successful players.

It's the same game plan with the ELS – create a supply of highly skilled entrepreneurs capable of building and sustaining successful companies. Instead of the theory that entrepreneurs are born, Lichtenstein believes entrepreneurs can be trained. The Entrepreneurial League System® classifies entrepreneurs into different “league” levels – from Rookie to Triple A – according to their skills in starting and operating a new enterprise. Lichtenstein set up his first ELS model in West Virginia. The Rapides Foundation was impressed and funded Lichtenstein to create an ELS for Central Louisiana. While not part of Cenla Advantage Partnership, the two groups work closely together and share the mission of creating a stronger economy for Central Louisiana by focusing on entrepreneurs and the businesses already located here.

To begin the creation of the Entrepreneurial League System® of Central Louisiana, Lichtenstein needed someone to be the project's general manager and “talent scout.” Stepping up to the plate was Keith Rabalais, a one-time entrepreneur himself. Rabalais started his own business, The Oil Exchange, in 1979 and sold it

Entrepreneurial League System



in 1997. Starting in March 2006, he began recruiting business people in the area to make up two 12-member teams, with each team having no two businesses alike. On July 7, those first two teams were officially launched.

Rabalais was pleased with the response from entrepreneurs. "That was the exciting part. Initially The Rapides Foundation grant was set up to field two teams in 2006 and two teams in 2007, but in the process of filling the first two teams, we had about 16 people who were interested and wanted in on it. So the Foundation allowed us to go ahead and field two additional teams. There's a lot more interest out there than anyone believed."

Rabalais also was responsible for hiring a coach for each team. "That's the secret to this thing, the coaches – their experience, their knowledge and their ability to pass that along

to an entrepreneur at no cost," he said. "That's incredible."

Edwin Caplan is one of the four coaches. His family's retail clothing store, Caplan's, was established in Alexandria in 1891. Now retired, or "rewired" as he calls it, he was drawn to the challenge and the uniqueness of the ELS. As coach, he leads monthly meetings where the entrepreneurs develop the skills to succeed in their business. Group members discuss the obstacles and successes they have encountered, and work as a team to help each other solve common problems.

The coaches also meet individually on a weekly basis with each entrepreneur on their team. In these personal meetings, the coach helps the entrepreneur establish a business strategy, solve problems and answer any questions about business management. Many times, the job entails simply "listening to what they want to achieve and having a shoulder to cry on," Caplan said. "They basically talk it through and give you the solution anyway; they just want to feel comfortable that what they're doing makes sense. The top is pretty lonely, so you need someone that you can just shoot off your problems to in confidence, someone who will help you through them, or who will just plain listen."

Carol Ulmer is one of the entrepreneurs on Caplan's team who knows what it's like to feel isolated. She and her husband, David, opened Jigsaw Events, a convention and trade show business, in July 2005. The stark change from working for a company that faithfully issues regular paychecks to being her own boss left her with a sense of fear and doubt, even though she felt confident about her knowledge of the service she was providing. She then joined ELS and regained her optimistic outlook.

Entrepreneurial League System

"I felt the ELS would be a great opportunity to go in and have a group of business people that I can talk over ideas with. It really is wonderful because you have such a diverse group of individuals that are part of the ELS, and there's no threat because we're all in non-competing businesses," she said. "It's been absolutely incredible for me. It really inspires you and gives you the support that you need, because when you're an entrepreneur and a small business owner, it's lonely out there."

Paul Maxwell has been a real estate broker since 1989 when he and his wife, LeAnn, formed Maxwell Properties Inc. He too knows of the isolation of being in the business world on your own. "If you look at our industry, the mom-and-pop real estate brokerage is kind of a dinosaur. Most of the large companies in our marketplace are franchise-affiliated," he said. "We have determined that being a family-owned and non-affiliated company is good for us, but it also has some limitations."

One of those limitations is losing out on opportunities. "What I wanted to do with ELS, is make sure that we're operating on par with the latest in technology and with as many of the advantages of doing business that are available out there," he said. "We thought that getting with business development leaders was probably the best way to do it, rather than hiring a consultant to tell us how to do that. I have a great deal of excitement about the program as well as the Central Louisiana area."

Keith Rabalais, too, is excited about the potential of the Entrepreneurial League System® of Central Louisiana, and he offers some early projections as evidence of its power to fuel our economy. Based on the aggregated numbers submitted by the first two ELS teams to gauge

their progress, they found, "Their total revenues for the first quarter were running about \$4 million per quarter or \$16 million annually. They employ a total of about 156 people," said Rabalais. "I really anticipate by next summer that those same two teams will be generating about \$20 million in revenues and employ about 200 people. That's pretty impressive. And that's just two teams. If the other two are equally successful, you're talking about \$40 million and maybe 400 employees."

With ELS it looks like we could be scoring a home run. Go teams. 

" We have determined that being a family-owned and non-affiliated company is good for us, but it also has some limitations. I have a great deal of excitement about the program as well as the Central Louisiana area."

Paul Maxwell, Maxwell Properties, Inc.

CAP Board

A Potpourri of Input

(continued from page 11)

“We knew we had a lot of good economic groups and good people doing good work, but there was nobody who was looking at Central Louisiana as a region and developing a regional strategy,” Chatelain continued. “What happens in Alexandria affects Bunkie, what happens in Natchitoches affects Winnfield, so we have to work together as a region. We can command more resources and we can draw together more talent. We’re a stronger economic force when we work together.”

Chatelain believes CAP has the potential to build an economic development infrastructure that will bring in added wealth to the area. “I think that as we look around the country, CAP is the type of economic development model other communities are embracing. It’s kind of the best practice in economic development. And when you look at the partnership between the local businesses and The Rapides Foundation, we have the resources to really make a difference. I’m very excited about it.”

Board member Joe Cunningham Jr. of Cunningham Financial Group in Natchitoches also is excited about CAP. He’s part of the small business community which has always figured prominently in economic development. His grandmother started the family business, Cunningham Insurance Agency, in 1935. “What I’m most excited about for CAP is that, there’s now a mechanism in place to help all pockets of people. CAP looks outside the box and asks, ‘what are the problems?’ and then deals with the root causes,” he said.

Cunningham agreed that CAP can be a major asset to the existing economic structure in Central Louisiana. “It’s like a hub and the spoke. You have all these little points on a wheel, all these boards out there that were doing their own thing and not really talking to each other. Maybe CAP is just the little hub in there that’s going to get all these things connected,” he said.

He wants CAP to be viewed as a helper and not a competitor. “CAP should be used as an

opportunity for those boards and chambers to fulfill their mandates and operate better,” he said. “CAP does not want to replace anybody or duplicate what anybody else is doing. CAP simply wants to facilitate the transfer and dissemination of information.”

In his own company, Cunningham has always embraced CAP’s tenet of providing not just jobs, but good jobs. “I have five employees. My goal here in this office is to make each of those employees the highest paid person at their position in this parish. It helps everybody. It helps them; it helps me.”

It is CAP’s emphasis on the creation of good jobs that attracted board member Dorothy Oliver. As executive director of the nonprofit LaSalle Community Action Association Inc., Oliver works with both high school students and adults to help them prepare for and get jobs. She has seen firsthand the problems an unskilled labor force faces. It’s her experience with job placement that CAP was seeking. “Actually I was recruited, and then I went through this extensive interview process. It really blew my mind, but once I got there I realized that I am basically representing the rural areas.”

Rural areas are struggling to meet and increase employment opportunities, and CAP wants to help. For example, CAP is assisting an industrial company in LaSalle Parish to identify what types of employees it really needs so that the company can make better hires.

Oliver believes her experience on the CAP board will increase her business acumen. “I like the knowledge I’m gaining about how big business is done. I know that as long as I’m invited to serve on the board, I’ll continue to serve, because I can already see the benefits.”

The entire CAP Board believe the benefits of CAP will be many, and will help strengthen economic and workforce development for all of Central Louisiana. Nineteen ready and committed board members representing our region have joined together to improve the standard of living for the residents of Central Louisiana.



Cenla Advantage Partnership (CAP)

Individual Investors:

Dr. and Mrs. Paul M. Davis, Jr.
 Dr. and Mrs. Frank A. Fitzgerald
 Joy Hodges
 Patrick and Randalle Moore
 Mrs. Bertie Deming Smith
 Joe D. Smith, Jr.

CAP

Company Investors:

Agilus Heath
 A Rental Gallery
 Ballina Farms
 The Bossier Group
 Capital One Bank
 Central Management Company, LLC
 Chase Bank
 CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital
 Cleco Corporation
 Colfax Banking Company
 Country Living Mobile Homes
 GEICO Direct, Leesville
 Gilchrist Construction Company, LLC
 Keller Enterprises
 Kinetix Broadband
 Lance Harris Companies
 Louisiana Machinery Company, LLC
 McDonald's of Alexandria, David and Glenda Stock, Owners
 Merchants & Farmers Bank & Trust, Leesville
 Morris Insurance Agency, Inc., Leesville
 Noble Flight
 Noles-Frye Realty
 Petron, Inc.

Phoenix Family Pharmacy, Leesville
 Procter & Gamble
 Rapides Regional Medical Center
 Ratcliff Construction Co., LLC
 Red River Bank
 Roy O. Martin Lumber Co. LLC / Martco LP
 The Rush Companies
 Scallan Contractors Inc.
 The Sellers Group
 Tudor Companies
 Walker Automotive



Enterprise Corporation of the Delta


New help for small business

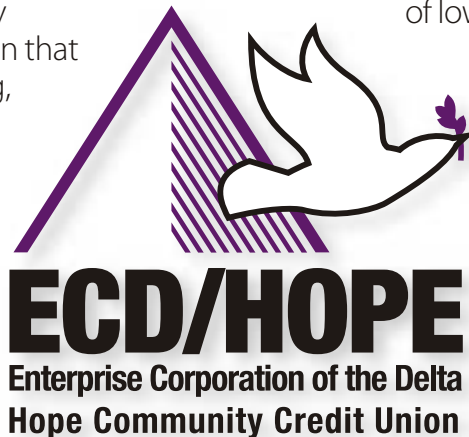
A project funded locally by The Rapides Foundation is helping provide loan assistance to some Central Louisiana small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Enterprise Corporation of the Delta is a private, nonprofit community development financial institution that provides commercial financing, mortgage loans and technical assistance to support businesses, entrepreneurs, home buyers and community development projects. ECD's mission is to strengthen communities, build assets and improve lives of people in

economically distressed areas of Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

ECD also sponsors Hope Community Credit Union, which provides a range of financial products and services that meet the needs of low- and moderate-income residents.

Thanks to a grant by The Rapides Foundation, an ECD office is located in Alexandria to serve all of Central Louisiana. For more information, call Charles Jemison, the Alexandria office's commercial loan officer, at 318-443-8381 or cjemison@ecd.org. The office is located at 1501A Wimbledon Drive in Alexandria. 



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