



TIMES-PICAYUNE COLUMN – June 8, 2008

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As the premier advocacy organization for business in West St. Tammany, our chamber is always looking for new ways to actively support our business community and invigorate our local economy. That is why we are pleased to be part of an effort to organize a young professional civic organization on the north shore. Since 1986, the south shore has had such an organization in the Young Leadership Council. Baton Rouge has also experienced the benefits of a similar organization when Forum 35 was organized in 1993 by their area young professionals.

Over their relatively short histories, these two organizations have raised more than \$25 million to support community enhancement projects. Signature projects of these organizations include: lighting the Crescent City Connection and the Baton Rouge Mississippi River Bridge, the “New Orleans Proud to Call it Home” and the “We are BR” marketing campaigns, the “Festival of Fins” art display and the Barton Community Leadership Program. Additionally, both organizations have been very active in quality of life issues. They have taken on significant community beautification projects and have supported the arts communities through a variety of programs.

In taking on all of these community projects, these organizations have engaged young professionals in the 25 to 40 year old age group. Not coincidentally, this is the demographic which has been deserting our metropolitan area and state in alarming numbers for more than a decade. Getting this age group invested in our community is one of the keys to keeping them here. Our young professionals are an essential ingredient in maintaining the vitality of our community.

Hurricane Katrina accelerated our community’s evolution from a bedroom community to an economic region in its own right. Over the past three years our chamber and community have moved quickly to adapt our programs and institutions to reflect this transformation. The establishment of a young professional civic organization is another step in our evolution as an economic region.

Our chamber leadership recognizes the significant positive impact that the Young Leadership Council and Forum 35 have had in their communities and we look forward to working with our partners in the East St. Tammany Chamber, Northshore Business Council and Northshore Community Foundation to foster the development of a young professional civic organization for our north shore community. This effort is being spearheaded by one of our chamber board members, Michele Avery. If you are interested in learning more about this effort, please email info@sttammanycommerce.org.

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David Guzan is the St. Tammany West Chamber of Commerce’s 2008 Chairman of the Board and CEO of Fairway Medical Center. He can be contacted at info@sttammanycommerce.org.