

## COMMERCE ON THE NORTHSHORE



I remember using the word “ecstatic” to describe how I felt when I moved to the northshore in 1998. Fast forward nearly 25 years later and I still love where I live. But, my, how things have changed!

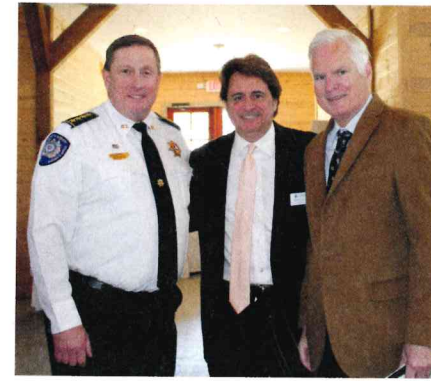
Having grown up in New Orleans, I remember traveling to the northshore, where there were only three red lights on 190 from Mandeville into Covington. In the ‘60s, we had family vacations at Camp Billy Boy on “the northshore”—specifically, it was on Rat’s Nest Road in Slidell, where we crabbed and fished from the pier and the sandy shore. St. Tammany’s population back then was nearly 40,000.

That was when the population began to grow rapidly. Looking at the census charts and percentages can be confusing, so let’s put it this way—in 1940, the parish population was 23,624. After slow growth for

the next twenty years, things took off, and we are now averaging over 40,000 new residents each decade. The 2020 census counted 264,570 residents! There’s so much about our downtowns, towns, rivers and various cultures that draws new residents and visitors alike.

Back in the ‘70s and ‘80s, there was a Mandeville chamber and a Covington chamber that in the ‘90s merged into St. Tammany West. The Greater Slidell Chamber changed its name to East St. Tammany. As one century ended and a new one began, talk of the need for one parish-wide Chamber commenced. The need for a strong voice of business with local and state government became more evident as our population grew. It was also evident that we needed to work together with business and civic organizations and with our local elected leaders. We had a seat at the table when talks initiated for the plans to widen Hwy. 190 in Covington from 4 to 6 lanes. That was a huge improvement for traffic flow and the commerce that occurred.

The creation of one Chamber of Commerce for all of St. Tammany occurred in November 2019. Today, our chamber membership stands at over 1,100. We boast outstanding volunteer leadership from diverse



industries on our Board of Directors. Over the years, we have recognized the importance of business to the quality of life, including special recognition ceremonies at our business appreciation luncheon.

The nearly-3-year-old St. Tammany Chamber currently has seven highly active committees. The Advocacy and Public Policy Committee vets issues prior to elections or actions by our parish council and legislators. The Small Business Council ensures the Chamber provides support where most needed for the times. For three years now we have had a Live Better Committee focusing on providing information for a healthier workforce. And thankfully, our young professionals group is now approaching its 15th year and has graduated many business leaders of today and tomorrow.

Our parish-wide Chamber continues to provide its members with educational and networking opportunities to help their businesses grow. And we continue to represent our members as the voice of business both locally and at the state level.



The growing pains and expanded opportunities are still with us as more newcomers continue to move in to enjoy the quality of life here on the northshore. As homebuilding and real estate have boomed, finance, insurance, healthcare, restaurants and retail followed and continue to grow. We are now the fourth-largest parish in Louisiana, behind East Baton Rouge, Jefferson and Orleans.

Yes, a lot has changed since 1960. The good life comes with growing pains. While time flies, it seems like it’s taking forever for the transportation and other critical infrastructure to catch up. Those of us daily traveling the widened Hwy. 21 and Hwy. 190 look back and are grateful for the improvements that move us along more quickly! Yet, more and more of us are anxious for the I-12 widening under construction to be complete!

The business leaders of the Chamber are ready and willing to stand together with our local, parish, state, legislative and congressional leaders to work to maintain and improve our long-standing quality of life that flourishes alongside our strong commerce and business communities. ®

Lacey Osborne, President  
& CEO; St. Tammany  
Chamber of Commerce

Timeless furnishings  
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