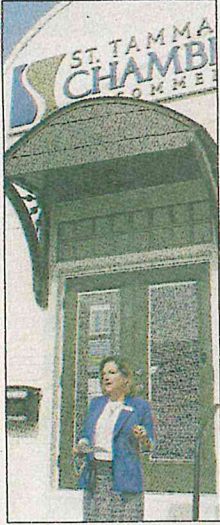


# St. Tammany Chamber has big plans for new Slidell office



St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce CEO Lacey Osborne speaks during the soft opening of the group's office in Olde Towne Slidell. The Chamber has an office in Covington, as well.

BY ANDREW CANULEITE  
Staff writer

The St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce opened the doors to its new office in Olde Towne Slidell on May 20, just long enough for a couple dozen staff, board members and public officials to get a quick glimpse of the space that chamber leaders believe will be a beacon for local merchants still measuring the effects of COVID-19.

The office, located at 2220 Carey St., will open fully to the public on July 1, pending continued drops in the number of COVID-19 cases and easements on public gathering restrictions to slow the virus's spread.

Though the official grand opening is more than two months away, spirits were high for the soft opening of the building, which sits among a row of popular restaurants, reception venues and saloons in the heart of the city's historic district. The chamber is renting the nearly 2,500-square-foot building with plans to eventually host networking events and business meetings, as well as provide space for chamber staff to handle administrative duties, including greeting visitors to the parish and prospective members.

"We're about a month behind schedule, but considering all that's been going on (with



STAFF PHOTOS BY ANDREW CANULEITE

St. Tammany Chamber past chairman Townsend Underhill, center, cuts the ribbon on a new office the group opened in Olde Towne Slidell on May 20. He was joined by Chamber CEO Lacey Osborne, St. Tammany Parish President Mike Cooper, Slidell Mayor Greg Cromer and area business leaders. The office is scheduled to open to the public July 1.

COVID-19), I think that's really strong," said past chamber board Chairman Townsend Underhill. "We're looking to really plant the flag here."

Finding a home in Slidell has been a chief goal for the chamber since it was formed in November. The East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce voted to dissolve in October, citing financial woes, which was a blow to the many thriving businesses it represented. The St. Tammany West Chamber, which primarily advocated for business in the Covington and Mandeville areas, voted on Nov. 11 to rebrand as the St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce, with the goal of unifying parish business interests under one banner.

Slidell Mayor Greg Cromer said the chamber building is significant because it displays a unified effort to promote business across the parish.

"There are no lines here between east and west, between Covington, Mandeville and Slidell," Cromer said. "We're

all one St. Tammany, and this indicates that. ... It's going to generate opportunities for all of the small businesses and the large businesses here too."

Parish President Mike Cooper agreed, and he singled out chamber CEO Lacey Osborne for her leadership in helping form the parishwide chamber and also helping to sustain momentum for the new group during the recent COVID-19 emergency orders that temporarily closed and continues to limit many businesses.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our communities, and this pandemic has had a significant effect on them," Cooper said. "The St. Tammany chamber is showing its commitment not only to Slidell but to all of St. Tammany Parish."

The chamber scaled back renovation to the property because of budget cuts due to COVID-19, but volunteers helped keep the project on track. Some members donated materials used in the renovation and another purchased the new sign above the doorway.

Kent Construction completed the bulk of the renovation work to the building, which now

includes a reception area, a large conference room, several smaller offices and a kitchenette.

The chamber also has an of-

fice at 610 Hollycrest south of Covington in state 12.

For more information, visit [sttammany.com](http://sttammany.com).