

## Despite great economic promise, prosperity in St. Tammany 'We still have some room to go'

BY ANDREW CANULETTE | Staff writer

May 10, 2024

1 of 2



Susan Bonnett Bourgeois, Secretary of the Department of Louisiana Economic Development, speaks at the State of Economic Development breakfast held at Covington Country Club on May 8. The St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce hosted the event, with Ochsner and the St. Tammany Farmer sponsoring.

PHOTO BY GRANT THERKILDSEN

The future of Louisiana's economy is bright, but there's plenty of hard work to be done before reaching promised land.

That's the message Louisiana Economic Development Secretary Susan Bonnett Bourgeois shared with about 200 local business leaders who gathered May 8 at Covington Country Club for a State of Economic Development breakfast hosted by the St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce.

Bourgeois, who previously headed the Covington-based Northshore Community Foundation for 16 years, was named secretary of LED in January by Gov. Jeff Landry. She said she's been charged with streamlining the processes by which the state attracts new businesses, as well as the means it uses to support those already here.

That starts with a new strategic plan for LED, something she said the department hasn't had in 16 years. It will be aided, she said, pending passage of a bill in the state Legislature that, in part, would create a private-sector board to help guide the agency, but also assure accountability from it.

Bourgeois said under her leadership, LED will focus, in particular, on growing the agribusiness, manufacturing, energy, medical and entertainment industries.

St. Tammany Corporation CEO Chris Masingill also spoke at the breakfast. He said his agency works to attract businesses that best align with the landscape, but also the mindset of its residents.

Masingill noted that St. Tammany businesses have a \$15 billion annual economic impact, which accounts for 20% of the economy in the greater New Orleans' region and 5% of the state. He said the parish's median household income (about \$77,000) remains the highest in Louisiana.

At the same time, Masingill noted that 48% of St. Tammany's workers still make less than \$35,000 annually.

"We still have some room to go," he said.

Masingill pointed to the Gulf South Commerce Park, planned where La. 1088 intersects Interstate 12 north of Mandeville, as the type of project crucial to the parish's economic fortune.

Locally-owned Crosby Development Company is readying nearly 1,000 acres there for large-scale logistics and distribution companies, advanced manufacturing, research and development, sustainable businesses, and health and science interests.

The project was announced to much fanfare in April, and Masingill said interest in the commerce park is high, with businesses from around the U.S. already expressing interest in locating there.

Email Andrew Canulette at [acanulette@sttammanyfarmer.net](mailto:acanulette@sttammanyfarmer.net)