

Daily Report

THIS MORNING'S HEADLINES / THU, OCT. 08, 2009

Organizations declare support for bond issue

The Downtown Development District voted unanimously for a resolution supporting Mayor-President Kip Holden's \$901 million bond issue this morning in a special meeting, an hour before a press conference with the same purpose. Representatives from the DDD, Baton Rouge Area Chamber, the Baton Rouge Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau, the Downtown Business Association, Women for Progress, the Louisiana Associated General Contractors, Baton Rouge Union of Police and Progress Is... met at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation in an attempt to counter the public criticism due to an ownership dispute over the Alive site and uncertainty over \$40 million in state funds to prepare it. "We wanted to make sure people knew the voices against the bond or to delay the bond are not the community sentiment. That's a minority that happens to be very loud," says Todd Teepell, one of the organizers of Progress Is...

Metro Council members Trae Welch, Joel Boe and Chandler Loupe have requested a special meeting Monday to discuss taking the measure off of the Nov. 14 ballot.

Councilwoman Tara Wicker, who represents downtown, says the Metro Council has received a deluge of e-mails requesting the measure be taken off of the ballot. "For every two e-mails in support of the bond issue, there are 10 or 15 saying don't do it," she says. "At this point, it's about public trust. Now people figure there is an underlying motive." Progress Is... sent out an e-mail to supporters Wednesday, asking for members to contact their Metro Council representative. While Wicker supports the bond issue, she is uncertain of her vote and hopes the administration provides new information about state funding for the project before the meeting.—**Emma James**

CEO says real estate may be best local investment

What's likely to be an investor's best bet along the 10/12 corridor in the next few years? **Stirling Properties CEO Marty Mayer** predicts it will be real estate in the hands of distressed owners who can't find financing to refinance their commercial debt. He notes a huge spike in commercial mortgage maturities through 2012 likely will present opportunities for "those people who have cash and are able to move quickly." Mayer predicts such opportunities will arise all along the corridor, although not to the extent that other regions of the nation have experienced. "Our motto around Stirling Properties is TGIF, 'Thank God it isn't Florida.' We're in the best place at the best time to be in the country. We're feeling some pain, but be glad we're not Florida, California, Nevada ... they are really crying the blues. Louisiana is still one of the bright spots in terms of retail activity." Mayer made his remarks this morning at the Louisiana CEO Forum, presented by *10/12* magazine at the BizTech Expo. Other speakers included Powell Group CEO Nanette Noland, Stine Lumber CEO Dennis Stine, Frantzen Voelker Conway Investments CEO David Voelker and Acadian Ambulance Service CEO Richard Zuschlag.—**Penny Font**



Final day of BizTech Expo at River Center

Today is the last day for *Business Report's* BizTech Expo, which is being held at the Baton Rouge River Center. It's the Gulf Coast's largest business show, with more than 200 local companies

exhibiting the latest technology and services for businesses. The show is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Visitors to the show can park in the River Center parking garages or find free parking and free shuttle bus service offered under the Interstate 10-Mississippi River Bridge, across from the Pastime restaurant. Buses will regularly go between the parking area and the River Center. Sponsors of the expo are Hancock Bank, Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport, Verizon Wireless, Gulf South Business Systems and WAFB-TV.

Three movie productions under way in Baton Rouge

If you notice mysterious signs around town and more trucks and trailers than normal, it's because three movies are under production in Baton Rouge.

Production started Wednesday on *Ticking Clock*, a psychological thriller starring Cuba Gooding Jr. The movie was shooting around MidCity, and the Westmoreland Shopping Center was filled with trucks and trailers. *Ticking Clock* will shoot around MidCity and downtown until the end of the month. This is the second movie Gooding has shot in Baton Rouge. The Academy Award winner shot *The Way of War* here at the end of 2007.

Video Girl will also shoot around MidCity through this month. The movie is about an aspiring ballerina, who ends up working in the music video industry in Baton Rouge after she sustains an injury. Her success in videos leads her to move to Hollywood, where she tries to build a new life while maintaining connections with her family back in Louisiana. The movie, which is also being shot at the Celtic Media Centre, stars Megan Good, who appeared in *Saw V*, *Brick* and *The Love Guru*.

Production of *Battle: Los Angeles* will begin Monday and continue through December. The big-budget science fiction thriller will be released by Columbia Pictures on Feb. 18, 2011. City-parish officials say there will be numerous action scenes that will require street closures. The public will be notified in advance so drivers can plan accordingly. A section of Interstate 49 in Shreveport was shut down for a month to shoot scenes for *Battle: Los Angeles*.

Publisher: Apologies to Blanco, Foster

Reporters and columnists can end up off base when they speculate or jump to conclusions and that leads people not to trust what they read or see, says *Business Report* Publisher Rolfe McCollister. McCollister says he's seen it happen firsthand, while he was heading Gov. Bobby Jindal's transition team. "I have to admit I was guilty of making that jump on occasion with Gov. Kathleen Blanco and with Gov. Mike Foster," he says. "For that I apologize to them. I was wrong." Read the rest of McCollister's column [here](#). Send comments to editors@businessreport.com.

Fabrication firm plans to hire 100 in Prairieville

Bronco Fabrication and Manufacturing has signed a long-term lease for a 52,000 square foot warehouse in Prairieville, a move that will lead the company to hire about 100 more workers over the next several years. Bronco, which provides pipe and vessel fabrication for EXCEL Group, will retrofit and equip the warehouse off La. Highway 621. The building is close to EXCEL's headquarters on Airline Highway. "We were delighted to be able to find a location for this expansion right in our own neighborhood," says David Roberts, EXCEL CEO.

Outback commits to only Louisiana shrimp

When you visit your local Outback Steakhouses here in Baton Rouge, or those located elsewhere in Louisiana, there's a good chance you won't have to ask where they get their shrimp. That's because every Outback in the state—14 in all—has entered into a "commitment" to continue buying Louisiana shrimp for their restaurants. Gov. Bobby Jindal says the decision will help the state promote the purchase and consumption of Louisiana shrimp and also send a signal to companies all across the nation. "The message is simple: buy Louisiana shrimp," Jindal said.

Shrimpers went on strike this summer as prices dropped to historic lows and processors are now

expressing a collective concern over a nationwide inventory that has surpassed half of what the country traditionally eats in a year. Outback's decision comes as a major boost to the domestic industry, especially since it, along with other national chains, used to buy American shrimp on a regular basis. In fact, Outback has bought Louisiana shrimp for their menus in recent years, but was planning on severing ties this quarter with local wholesalers and brokers—until Jindal and others stepped in. The challenge moving forward, according to Houma processor Danny Babin, is making sure fishermen can consistently catch the sizes that Outback will need—a task that is often in the hands of Mother Nature. That may be among the reasons why Outback only agreed to a "commitment" rather than something that would have been legally binding. Read the full story [here](#).—**Jeremy Alford**

Poll: Readers against 'flagship fee'

Fifty-five percent of people who responded to a *Daily Report* poll say they are opposed to LSU adding a \$1,000 "flagship fee" to its tuition costs. Twenty-five percent of people who participated in the online survey say they support the fee, while 16% back it only if state TOPS grants cover the charges, and 4% are undecided. Nearly 1,600 people participated in the survey. LSU Chancellor Michael Martin says the university needs the authority to either raise tuition or implement the new fee as a way of dealing with state budget cuts.

Today's question: Would you vote for Mayor Kip Holden's bond proposal if the Alive project were removed from the plan?

News roundup: Report says 32% of employees admit to playing hooky ... Many retailers report September sales declines

Unusual excuses for missing work: A new survey found that 32% of workers have played hooky from work at least once in the past year. The CareerBuilder survey found that 29% of employers have checked on employees who called in sick and 15% have fired people for skipping work without a legitimate excuse. More than 7,800 employees and hiring managers participated in the survey. Employers also listed some of the strangest excuses they've heard for missing work. Those included such gems as: "I'm convinced my spouse is having an affair and I'm staying home to catch them," "My buddies locked me in the trunk of an abandoned car after a weekend of drinking," "I accidentally hit a nun with my motorcycle," and "I got sunburned at a nude beach and can't wear clothes".

Better than expected: Early September reports from retailers show sales are still falling amid worries about jobs and tight credit, but many of the results came in better than expected. As stores announced their results today, teen retailer Wet Seal and Macy's reported smaller-than-expected declines in sales at stores open at least a year. The measure is considered a key indicator of a retailer's health. The comparison is to a weak September last year when business plummeted during the financial meltdown. September sales also benefited this year from a late Labor Day and this year's later school openings.