

Second from left, Sen. A.G. Crowe, R-Slidell, talks with Instructional Service Center Automotive program students during an Open House Reception following the ribbon cutting to officially open the LTC Region 1's new facility in Slidell.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DELGADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# Hire Learning

Area colleges and universities **expand their offerings** and join forces to meet growing work force demands

By Diana Chandler  
Contributing Writer

North Shore colleges and universities have moved beyond competition to collaborate on meeting evolving work force education needs, forming functional partnerships including industry, the private sector, government and secondary education.

Delgado Community College, Southeastern

Louisiana University and Louisiana Technical College are expanding their curriculums and joining forces to meet growing work force demands in the technical sciences, engineering technologies, allied health care and nursing, and building and production trades.

Joining the universities are Greater New Orleans Inc., a 10-parish economic development partnership committed to the area's economic growth, and the St. Tammany

Parish government and school board, with the support and cooperation of various government, business and private sector groups.

"I think we just all sort of woke up one minute and realized we were not competitors and it would make more sense for us to cooperate," says John Crain, interim president of Southeast Louisiana University.

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“We do feel that in terms of meeting the needs of the North Shore work force, we are playing a particular leadership role because that’s our job. That’s not to say that other universities aren’t involved.”

LTC Region 1 has joined with Delgado Northshore to provide technical training at the new Slidell Instructional Service Center, marking the technical college’s first course offerings on the North Shore since Hurricane Katrina.

Courses such as air conditioning and refrigeration, automotive technology, the electrical trades, health care, diesel mechanics, pipefitting and welding will provide workers with skills industry surveys show are highly in demand here.

Kim Rugon, provost of LTC Region 1, says the college plays a critical role in providing skilled workers and enjoys the cooperation of business and industry groups who desperately need capable employees.

“Today’s work force is based on a person having a skill set and we teach that skill set,” Rugon says.

Technical education is constantly evolving, with companies approaching Rugon to request the addition of needed courses. In response, Rugon has increased training in allied health programs, welding and automotive mechanics to meet changing work force demands.

Ron Wright, Delgado Community College chancellor, boasts of the community and technical colleges’ unique successes in work force vitality.

Delgado plays a critical role in developing the North Shore’s work force by tapping into a population that has been neglected educationally, providing the remedial skills needed to get them ready for technical training and employment, Wright says.

“Let the lights go out in New Orleans and see who you call. You call Delgado graduates to go up the pole and get your lights back on,” not the person with a doctorate in psychology, Wright says. “We are so valuable to the community.

“It’s always been our mission to develop human capital. The most important currency in this country is human capital,” Wright says. “The first question that a business asks when they’re thinking about moving into an area is, ‘Do you have the work force I need?’”

**Marty Mayer, president and CEO of Stirling Properties,** begins his term in



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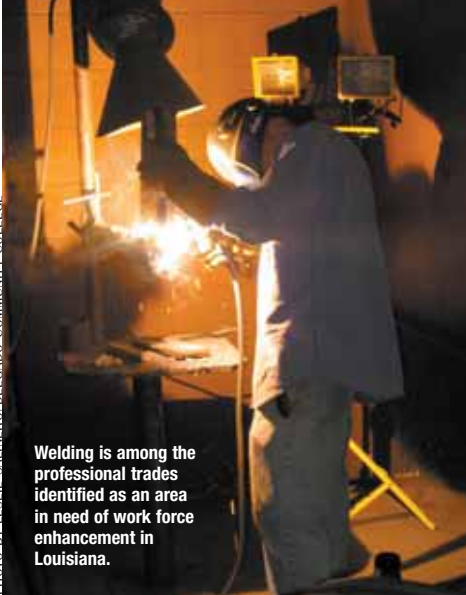
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Welding is among the professional trades identified as an area in need of work force enhancement in Louisiana.

March as the new chairman of GNO Inc.

Mayer is excited about the University Square project, bringing several parties together on one campus in Lacombe, sharing specialized lab space and avoiding the unnecessary duplication of facilities.

“They all don’t need to be trying to teach the same thing,” Mayer says. “The cooperation has been very good.”

Southeastern, Delgado Northshore, LTC Region 1 and the St. Tammany Parish School Board will all share space at the 150,000-square-foot facility, parts of which could open as early as next year, leaders say.

The new complex will better position the area to attract business and industry as the Interstate 10/Interstate 12 corridor continues to develop, says Ashley Chitwood, interim dean of Delgado Northshore.

Chitwood points out the cooperative “two-plus-two” program Southeastern is embarking on with Delgado Northshore, allowing students to earn a bachelor’s degree by following two years at Delgado with two years at Southeastern.

“The wonderful thing is that when there’s a clear pathway for students, it motivates them to get started,” Chitwood says. Students are able to go to work in two years, while continuing their education at Southeastern.

Southeastern has responded to changing work force demands by adding degree programs in engineering technology, supply chain management and a clinical option in radiologic technology.

“Those are all programs that feed directly into the community work force,” Crain says.

The supply chain management program is the first of its kind in Louisiana. Also unique to the state are two technology specializations at Southeastern, namely programs in mechanical and computer engineering technology.

On the horizon at Southeastern is an engineering technology building, still in the planning stages and estimated to cost more than \$21 million. •



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