



Print Page

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I-12 corridor is hot property

By Brennan David

They don't have a name yet, but one group of North Shore leaders is poised to make a big impact on the region.

Officials from the Florida Parishes recently met at the St. Tammany Economic Development Foundation office in Mandeville to discuss residential and commercial promotion of the region, specifically the Interstate 12 corridor in St. Tammany, Tangipahoa and Livingston parishes.

"We have learned that what is good for St. Tammany and Livingston is good for Tangipahoa," said Bob Basford, Tangipahoa Economic Development Foundation executive director.

Basford said officials from across the region were invited to discuss the official role of a recent I-12 marketing study. The group began the day unnamed before voting on branding, name recognition and the creation of a regional Web site to enhance the marketability of the North Shore. The group also decided on a standard logo.

The group received a Tier II \$100,000 grant from Louisiana Economic Development to help fund its efforts, which was matched by the TEDF. The money will be used to identify business development opportunities, create marketing strategies and develop materials to recruit expanding and relocating businesses.

"We are trying to minimize the separation of parishes," Basford said. "We want to show the country this is what we have."

The Florida Parishes Economic Development Association restructured its board in January to adopt an aggressive new mission focusing on the parishes that make up the I-12 corridor. Once the marketing study is examined and voted upon, the FPEDA will assume an approved name.

The FPEDA is made up of six board members with William Joubert, president of the organization and director of the Southeast Louisiana Business Center, representing Southeastern Louisiana University, and representatives from each parish.

According to Basford, the name "Louisiana I-12 Alliance" was agreed upon by the board but is still yet to be finalized.

With a marketable name and identity, Joubert said the group will work toward detaching itself from New Orleans. The North Shore has more registered voters than Baton Rouge, New Orleans and Lafayette, he said, giving the five-parish region power.

"Our first mission is eight-laning Interstate 12," Joubert said. "We need the infrastructure that will help grow the region."

James Hartman, STEDF communications director, said the unnamed group believes the North Shore and I-12 corridor is an untapped region of economic resources that will include residential and clean industrial developments.

“Never has there been this kind of outreach to promote the region,” Hartman said.

Stirling Properties President Marty Mayer participated in the organization of the group. He believes the I-12 corridor will be the place to be in Louisiana for the next 10 years.

The real estate company will play a major role in the development of the North Shore because it owns a substantial amount of property along the corridor. As businesses continue to relocate to the region, many will choose Tangipahoa because of the intersection of Interstates 12 and 55, as well as the fact that this area does not rely on a levee system for protection, Mayer said.

“Everyone realizes this corridor is the major economic engine of the state,” Mayer said. “This region is one of the shining jewels of this state.”

The North Shore group is not the only group marketing the 86-mile stretch of interstate. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation will spend an estimated \$1 million in the development of a brand name, message and media spots for the 240 miles of interstate that stretch across the state from the Sabine River to the Pearl River.

The project was started in late May and will meet today. The New Orleans leg of the interstate is not a formal part of the regional campaign.

“Our consultants are talking with their consultants to make sure they don’t clash,” Joubert said. “We will be marketing our particular corridor.”

John Spain, Baton Rouge Area Foundation executive vice president, said he encourages all communities to create economic development boards like FPEDA.

“Our system will link the communities together so they can help each other,” Spain said. “There are also places we can cooperate. The only way to get things done is to set priorities. Otherwise, each region is fighting over the same money.”

Spain said the group will also concentrate on changing Louisiana’s national image and on promoting programs already in place to develop business.

Though invited, St. Helena and Washington parishes were not represented at the North Shore meeting.