

FROM AUSTIN, TX TO LOUISVILLE, KY ***Celebrating Nine Years of Regional Learning***

For the seventh time in nine years, Baton Rouge area leaders will travel to a great American city and region to reflect upon important policy issues facing our community and learn how the destination region addresses similar matters. This year's trip to Louisville, KY promises to be an incredible learning opportunity with many case studies for participants to evaluate. As a river city, it has leveraged its shipping and cargo history to create Worldport, the worldwide air hub for UPS. It has also created innovative solutions in areas such as public transit, talent retention and attraction, public education, international business development, and downtown development.

Previous Canvas Workshop trips to Austin, Nashville, Raleigh-Durham, Portland, Richmond, and Pittsburg have exposed participants to a wide range of ideas and practices for economic and community development. Equally important, the trips have created new networks among business and civic leaders in the Capital Region – connections vital for implementing lessons learned upon return to the Baton Rouge area.

Austin, TX

The Canvas Workshop series began with a trip to Austin in 2003. Austin offered enduring lessons about regional economic development; arts, entertainment, and downtown revitalization; education and workforce development; and technology/R&D. But the Austin trip's most profound impact on the Baton Rouge area was that it catalyzed a new community mindset: a fervent belief among dozens of top community leaders that the Baton Rouge area could and should be better, and that we could make it happen with concerted effort. Top board members of the Chamber of Commerce came back to Baton Rouge committed to transform their "small town chamber" into a regional economic engine. Five years later, the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) is implementing an aggressive, five-year (2006-2010), \$15MM regional economic development program that has generated major public policy victories at the state level, recruited and/or retained thousands of good jobs, and won two dozen national awards. Several Austin participants created a new volunteer community group, Austin 6, to advocate for progressive changes like term limits for boards and commissions, which passed three years later.

Nashville, TN

In Nashville, Canvas Workshop participants focused on downtown development and the arts, education, diversity and minority business, and healthcare. The trip emphasized the economic value of investing in quality-of-life assets as Nashville had recently completed an exciting new downtown library and a national-caliber performing arts center. Participants learned about the value of community-led efforts to improve public education, and the creation of Advance Baton Rouge (a public education reform partnership between BRAC, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, and 100 Black Men) a year later was inspired to a substantial degree by the Nashville experience. Also highlighted in Nashville was the importance of strong, progressive, assertive political leadership. Nashville's mayor inspired participants with his vision for his community while their previous mayor had recently been elected Governor of Tennessee. The new community mindset that began in Austin and strengthened in Nashville also spilled over into the political arena and was partially responsible for the election of Kip Holden as EBR Mayor-President in late 2004. Holden espoused consistent messages about creating "the next great American city," bringing people together, aggressively selling the community

Cameras on the Move

to business executives around the world, and solving long-standing transportation and infrastructure challenges.

Raleigh-Durham, NC

In Raleigh-Durham, participants focused on public education, rebuilding the city core, regional economic development, healthcare, and public transportation. A major lesson from the Raleigh-Durham experience was that targeted investments in world-class universities and related research capacity, over time, can catalyze economic development and transform a region into a widely acknowledged leader in technological innovation. The workshop highlighted the importance of advancing LSU to the top tier of research universities and increasing funding for the Pennington Biomedical Research Center. In late 2007, BRAC released a white paper, *Transforming LSU into a Premier Public Research University: An Investment in Louisiana's Economic Future*, laying out the steps that Louisiana would need to take for LSU to climb in the national rankings and reach its potential as a catalyst for economic development statewide. In August 2008, for the first time ever, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked LSU in the top tier of its "Best National Universities" ranking for 2009. Another major lesson from the Raleigh-Durham experience was the importance of taking a regional approach to transportation planning and development. Raleigh-Durham's Regional Transportation Alliance, an organization supported by more than 100 private businesses and 22 chambers of commerce, facilitates solution-oriented transportation dialogues through the Triangle Mobility Action Partnership (Tri-MAP). The Partnership includes representatives from two regional metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), the public transit authority, business leaders, and elected officials, among others. In 2008, BRAC launched its regional transportation group, a business-led effort to provide a forum for focused discussion of regional transportation priorities, strategically pursue major regional transportation projects by securing adequate resources, and continuously refine a shared regional vision among key stakeholders.

Portland, OR

In Portland, participants focused on smart growth and land use, environmental sustainability, regional transportation strategies, knowledge-based economic development, and diversity. The Portland area is vastly different from the Baton Rouge area in many ways. Perhaps most obvious, the area is home to roughly three times as many people as the Capital Region. A major lesson from the Portland experience, however, was that regional thinking is critical for harnessing the economic benefits of growth while keeping the downsides of that growth (e.g., traffic congestion, pollution, and sprawl) to a minimum. Many of the topics discussed in Portland provided evidence that the expanding Baton Rouge area is on the right track to do the same thing; the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan and BRAC's new regional transportation group provide evidence of this. Portland's downtown redevelopment efforts provided a great model for those working to redevelop blighted areas in the Capital Region. The conversation focused on downtown incentives, helping to push for Plan Baton Rouge Phase II, and additionally furthered efforts to establish a Redevelopment Authority for East Baton Rouge Parish. Four young Portland participants created a new volunteer community group, Up Four Change, to advocate for progressive changes important to young people, such as the creation of a downtown entertainment district and the promotion of green development, additionally working to get young people onto local boards and commissions where they might take leadership roles in implementing some of those changes. The group meets monthly and now boasts dozens of members.

Canvas on the Move

Richmond, VA

The Canvas Workshop to Richmond in 2009 focused on a number of issues directly related to the topic areas that the Capital Region are addressing. Participants heard from experts about the Richmond region's progress on global commerce, regional cooperation, workforce, arts and recreation, downtown development, technology and innovation, redevelopment, and community identity. Many positive strategies were garnered from these speakers. On the workforce front, panelists drove home the point that a region's workforce investment boards are a vital component of building and maintaining a robust workforce development system, which in turn adds to an area's attractiveness to potential capital investment. In terms of regional cooperation, participants learned of the value of marketing the area as one region, instead of multiple parishes and municipalities. How when a region unifies itself, it produces a much more complete product to sell. This fit in nicely with the discussion on community branding, which showed the importance of building a solidified message for the entire region. Also noteworthy was the discussion on redevelopment. Speakers provided a list of examples of steps taken to redevelop downtrodden areas of the region, and how that redevelopment has increased the value of the entire metropolis.

Pittsburgh, PA

The economic renaissance of Pittsburgh is a true success story that many around the country are trying to emulate. This reclamation made it a natural Canvas Workshop destination. Entrepreneurship played a key role in the trip as a group of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial-service providers discussed the region's growth in supplying opportunities and capital. Multiple sessions were held on the improvements in public and career education that Pittsburgh has undergone. One such speaker was the CEO of Manchester Bidwell Corporation, who oversees the "diverse programming [that] combines to create empowering educational environments for adults-in-transition as well as urban and at-risk youth." The work at Manchester Bidwell was impressive enough that the Greater Baton Rouge Arts Council, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAAF), and the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority have been working to bring a franchise of the organization to the region. Current plans call for it to be located across the street from the soon-to-be-refurbished Lincoln Theater. Former Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy joined others in detailing exactly how the city's metamorphosis came about. With two land-grant universities and Pennington Biomedical Research Center located within the Baton Rouge area's borders, an important aspect in the region's economic future is a strengthening of public/private partnerships. The importance of this issue was reinforced by representatives from Carnegie Mellon University and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development as they discussed the importance of innovation on boosting regional growth. Finally, the redevelopment of Pittsburgh's riverfront and downtown were highlighted to show real-world examples of the assets that these areas can become.