

LABI Announces Small Business Rebirth Awards

Baton Rouge, La. (September 12, 2016) – The Louisiana Small Business Rebirth Fund announced \$350,000 in grants to 57 small businesses impacted by the August flooding across South Louisiana. Within the first week, the grant program received more than 600 applications, exhausting funding and underscoring the tremendous need among small businesses, as well as the magnitude of the flood's impact and the insufficient resources available to rebuild.

"The grant funds will help pay for the reconstruction of the building, which will allow the practice to provide the critical service of medical eye care to our community," said Kevin Rogers, owner of Central Eye Center in Greenwell Springs, a grant award recipient.

Some grant recipients specified that they would use the funding to pay employees who helped with clean-up and recovery efforts. The vast majority of recipients expressed intentions to reopen in their current locations, after critical repairs are made to their facilities and equipment is replaced. Only a fraction of the grant recipients reported that they had flood insurance coverage. Roughly half of the businesses are owned by minorities, women or veterans and, on average, the number of employees of small businesses awarded grants is fewer than 10.

"We are glad to be of help, but, frankly, current federal and state resources are falling far short of the needs of small businesses. We have pledged to Rebirth Fund applicants that we will continue to aggressively advocate on their behalf for additional financial support to rebuild better and stronger," said Stephen Waguespack, president of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI). "Every

application had merit and the independent review committee had to make some tough choices about how best to utilize the available funds. There are many other deserving applications which is why the need for additional donations is so critical.”

First-round grants were made to small businesses in Ascension, East Baton Rouge, Iberia, Lafayette, Livingston and Pointe Coupee Parishes, representing industries including daycare, restaurants/food service, grocery stores, contractors and health care facilities, including physicians’ offices.

Donations to the Rebirth Fund from large and small businesses as well as individuals around the country made possible the first round of grants. Donations are tax deductible and 100 percent is awarded directly to affected small businesses. Hundreds more applications have been submitted and will be reviewed, pending additional donations to the Rebirth Fund.

“It’s so important that we’re able to raise additional donations so that we can continue awarding grants to those who were impacted so profoundly,” said Adam Knapp, president and CEO of the Baton Rouge Area Chamber. “The volume of applications we continue to receive makes clear the tremendous unmet needs of small businesses.”

Those interested in contributing to the Louisiana Small Business Rebirth Fund are encouraged to visit www.LaBizRebirth.org.

An independent committee with technical, accounting and legal expertise reviewed the applications to prioritize grants to affected businesses.

Announced last month, the Louisiana Small Business Rebirth Fund was created to provide need-based triage grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000 to help small businesses recover.

Eligible small businesses must have been located within one of

the 22 parishes included in the federal disaster declaration area, have 50 or fewer employees, and have been in business on August 10, 2016.

Last month, the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) and the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) announced the creation of the Louisiana Small Business Rebirth Fund, representing partnership with Greater New Orleans, Inc. (GNO, Inc.), the Louisiana chapter of the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), the Louisiana Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (LACCE) and One Acadiana. NOLA Media Group pledged \$100,000 in seed funding to initiate corporate donations. Since then, dozens of companies, individuals, and business organizations have contributed to the Fund.

Information is available at www.LaBizRebirth.org.