

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

NAVIGATING
CHALLENGES.
SUCCEEDING
TOGETHER.

ASC NSION
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.

“INNOVATE,
PIVOT,
AND
PLAN...”



While the year 2020 has been undoubtedly difficult, I am inspired by what we have been able to achieve and overcome.

While sustaining existing businesses and recruiting new businesses to Ascension will always be the focus and motivation of what we do, working in the field of economic development constantly tasks us to innovate, pivot, and plan for the next shift – be it political change, global economic change, natural disasters, or advances in technology that make ways of creating products obsolete. In terms of disruption, 2020 brought us a global pandemic as well as national political and social disruption. It also brought us new technology to work remotely, serve customers differently, create innovation in safety and wellness, increase dialogue in embracing diversity, and thoughts of how to re-imagine the next phase of technology and innovation in business.

Ascension Parish continues to maintain a high-performing economy, a top-rated public school system (that offers multiple methods of learning during this pandemic), and a community of people focused on supporting one another. With our continued dedication to economic development, Ascension will continue to be a premier destination for business locations and expansions that will generate jobs and prosperity for our community.

As we reflect on 2020 and look to the future, I have no doubt that our best days are ahead. Looking forward to sharing those days with you in-person (and virtually).

KATE MACARTHUR
President & CEO | Ascension Economic Development Corp.

OUR STAFF

Kate MacArthur, President & CEO

Lisa Laws, Project Manager

Misty Taillon, Administrative Assistant

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2020 IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

ASCENSION PARISH GROWTH TREND CONTINUES IN 2020

Our entire team, board, and community rose to the task of navigating challenges related to COVID-19 in 2020. A summary of some key achievements is seen below. Read on and learn more about challenges answered, opportunities realized, and successes achieved over the past year.

\$1.3
Billion

**NEW CAPITAL
INVESTMENT**

#1

**FASTEST GROWING
PARISH IN LOUISIANA**

63%

**TOTAL BUSINESSES
THAT RECEIVED PPP
LOANS**

3

**PROJECT
ANNOUNCEMENTS**

69

NEW JOBS

16,051

**LOCAL JOBS RETAINED
THROUGH PPP LOANS**

35%

**INCREASE IN
RESIDENTIAL
BUILDING PERMITS**

27%

**INCREASE IN NEW
HOME SALES**

2

**AWARDS
RECOGNIZING
QUALITY OF LIFE**

1

**COMMUNITY
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

EXPANSION SUCCESS

STRONG GROWTH CONTINUES IN 2020

THREE OF OUR EXISTING EMPLOYERS EXPANDED THIS YEAR, ADDING A TOTAL POTENTIAL OF **69 JOBS** TO OUR COMMUNITY.

Not only are these companies continuing to grow, but they are also a great reflection of the industrial diversity in our community. They represent the chemical manufacturing, agricultural manufacturing, and renewable energy industries. These companies do not just benefit our local economy, they produce products we all use in our daily lives and are vital to keeping America strong.



RENEWABLE ENERGY GROUP, INC., INVESTING \$825 MILLION IN THEIR GEISMAR SITE AND CREATING 60 NEW PERMANENT JOBS.

The Geismar facility is the first renewable diesel plant built in the US and was acquired by REG in 2014. REG made additional improvements to the plant, taking its initial 75-million gallon nameplate facility up to 90-million gallons per year of demonstrated capacity. This announced capacity expansion will increase production by 250 million gallons annually to 340 million gallons per year. 60 new permanent employees will be hired through this expansion.

“REG Geismar has proven to be a tremendous asset for our company and is a natural site for increasing production of our lower-carbon renewable diesel. **The state of Louisiana and Ascension Parish have been great partners who encouraged us every step along the way as we developed our expansion plan.** They truly understand the broad economic and environmental benefits that renewable fuels provide, and we look forward to our continued partnership with them as we undertake this project”.

CYNTHIA (CJ) WARNER

President & CEO | Renewable Energy Group, Inc.



CF INDUSTRIES IS INVESTING \$41 MILLION IN THEIR DONALDSONVILLE SITE, CREATING 7 NEW PERMANENT JOBS.

CF Industries will make a \$41.4 million capital investment to enhance nitric acid production at the world's-largest nitrogen fertilizer complex in Donaldsonville, Louisiana. This expansion will increase the concentration of its industrial-grade nitric acid from 60 percent to 65 percent in the Nitric Acid No. 4 plant, which carries an annual production capacity of 600,000 tons. Additionally, new rail car and truck loading will be included as part of the reinvestment. Through the project, seven new jobs will be created.

“CF Industries is pleased to continue our long history of investing in and expanding our Donaldsonville Nitrogen Complex and creating jobs in Louisiana,” President and CEO Tony Will said. “The capital investment we are making to enhance nitric acid production at the site will further expand Donaldsonville’s production flexibility and enable us to meet strong demand for the product, particularly from Louisiana’s strong chemicals industry. We appreciate the support from Governor Edwards, as well as from Ascension Parish and local leaders, to bring this project to fruition.”

TONY WILL

President & CEO | CF Industries



Westlake

WESTLAKE CHEMICAL IS INVESTING \$69 MILLION IN THEIR GEISMAR SITE, CREATING 2 NEW PERMANENT JOBS.

At the end of 2020, Westlake Chemical completed an approximately \$69 million Vinyl Chloride Monomer (VCM) & Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) Expansion of 1000MMlb/yr creating at least two new permanent jobs.

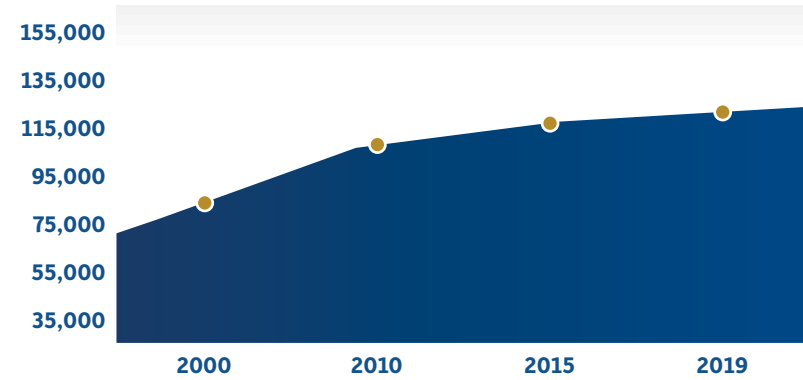
Westlake is an international manufacturer and supplier of petrochemicals, polymers and building products that enhance the daily lives of people around the world. Westlake Chemical’s Geismar Vinyls Complex, located in Ascension Parish, is an integrated producer of Chlorine, Caustic and Polyvinyl Chloride resin as finished products.

“Ascension Economic Development Corporation provides outstanding support throughout the process of securing investment for our Geismar site projects. Capital investment decisions are important to long-term stability and we value the assistance we receive on the local level in Ascension Parish.”

JOHN SCROGGINS

Plant Manager | Westlake Chemical

POPULATION GROWTH 2000-2019



COMMUNITY & QUALITY OF LIFE

ASCENSION PARISH IS THE FASTEST-GROWING PARISH IN LOUISIANA

Ascension Parish, with a population of 126,604, grew 18% from 2010 to 2019 making it the fastest-growing parish in Louisiana. The City of Gonzales has been ranked the 10th fastest growing city in Louisiana in both 2019 and 2020.



ASCENSION PARISH SCORES BIG ON QUALITY OF LIFE IN 2020



Money

PRAIRIEVILLE
Top 50 Places to Live
2020

MEASURE OF AMERICA
of the Social Science Research Council

ASCENSION PARISH
Highest Quality of Life
in Louisiana
2020

70% OF PEOPLE SAID SCHOOLS WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON THEY CHOSE TO LIVE IN ASCENSION

23,455 students throughout 30 school campuses with one more under construction, operating with an approximate \$258 million general fund budget.

9% STUDENT ENROLLMENT GROWTH

OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS AT ASCENSION PUBLIC SCHOOLS



DUTCHTOWN HIGH SCHOOL AND ST. AMANT HIGH SCHOOL ARE THE TWO LARGEST TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL CAMPUSES IN THE STATE.

88.6%

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: PERCENT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE OR HIGHER

Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates US Census Bureau



THE CITY OF GONZALES WINS STATEWIDE COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARD IN 2020

The City of Gonzales was the statewide winner of the Louisiana Municipal Association's prestigious "Community Achievement Award." The City won in the category of "Outstanding Community Improvement in Technology & Creativity," for the \$15 million expansion to the City's wastewater treatment facility and improvements to the infrastructure throughout the City.

ASCENSION PARISH HAS THE HIGHEST HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN THE STATE OF LOUISIANA

In the second quarter of 2020, the average employment in Ascension was 40,588. The average weekly wage was \$1,105. The highest average wage was in manufacturing at \$1,976/month.



\$80,527

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

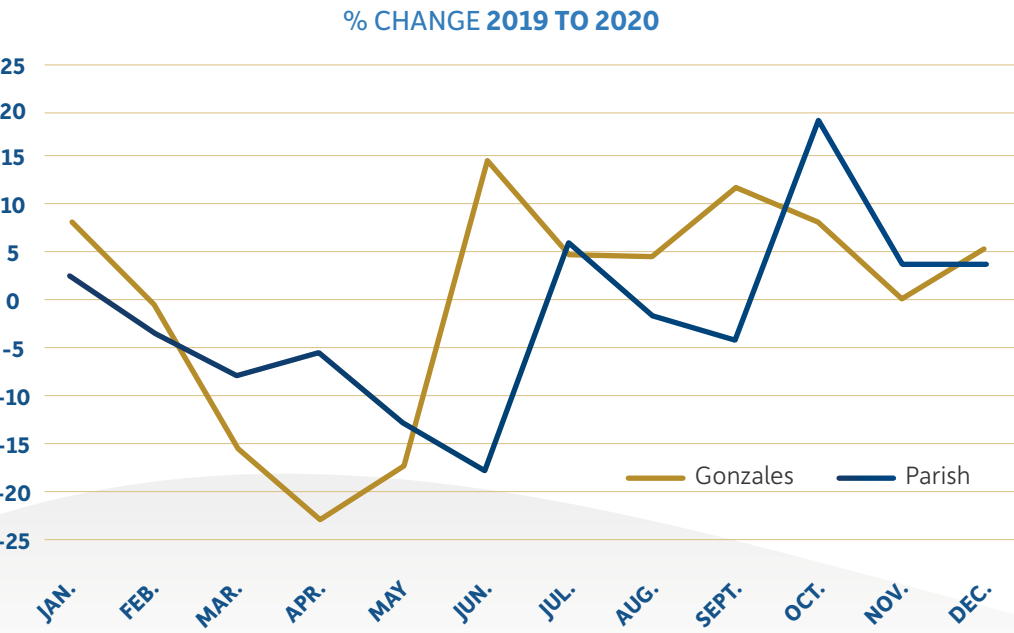
Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates US Census Bureau

ECONOMY & EMPLOYMENT

OUR COMMUNITY WEATHERED THE COVID STORM WELL, THANKS TO THE STRENGTH OF OUR LOCAL ECONOMY AND EMPLOYERS

SALES TAX REBOUNDED IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2020

The impact of the pandemic was felt between February to June as reflected by a decrease in sales tax collections from the same time period in 2019. Tax collections have rebounded well in both the Parish and the City of Gonzales in the second half of 2020. In 2020, sales tax collections in Ascension Parish were at \$157 Million, which is 1% less than 2019. The amount collected was almost the same amount as 2018.



OUR “TOP 10 LIST” OF BUSINESS EMPLOYERS IN ASCENSION PARISH

1. BASF | 1,198 EMPLOYEES

BASF’s Geismar site is a world-class facility making chemicals that are used in hundreds of everyday consumer items such as athleisure wear, sporting goods and household cleaning products and detergents.

2. SHELL CHEMICAL | 630 EMPLOYEES

Shell Chemicals Geismar facility has produced diversified chemicals used in products such as soft drink bottles, clothing, pillows, and surgical supplies.

3. SMITH TANK & STEEL | 600 EMPLOYEES

A nationwide contractor specializing in the construction and repair of API storage tanks.

4. CF INDUSTRIES | 494 EMPLOYEES

CF Industries is a leading global manufacturer of hydrogen and nitrogen products for clean energy, emissions abatement, fertilizer, and other industrial applications.

5. HUNTSMAN CHEMICAL | 450 EMPLOYEES

Huntsman/Rubicon Geismar manufactures differentiated and specialty chemicals. Materials from this facility are used in various markets, including food production, aerospace, construction, automotive, and more.

6. EATEL | 390 EMPLOYEES

EATEL provides an entire suite of telecommunication services and is part of the REV Broadband network.

7. HONEYWELL | 336 EMPLOYEES

The Honeywell Specialty Materials Geismar facility is manufacturing next-generation products to cool cars, appliances, and buildings as well as additional product lines.

8. VOLKS CONSTRUCTORS | 307 EMPLOYEES

Volks Constructors is a diversified heavy industrial contractor providing manufacturing, field services, and industrial specialties to the petrochemical and related industries.

9. CABELAS | 303 EMPLOYEES

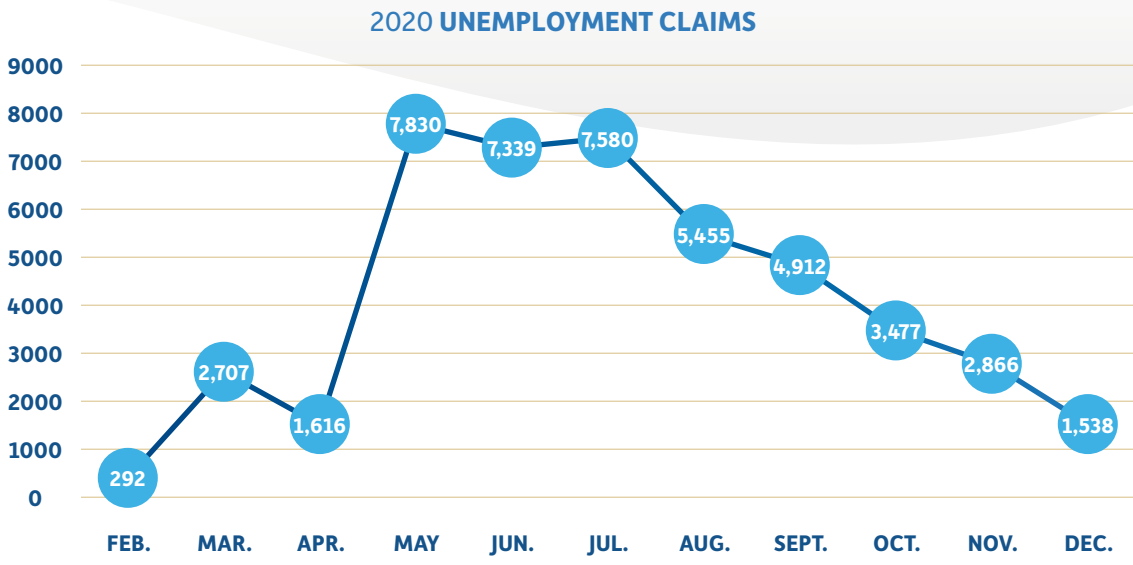
The World’s Foremost Outfitter of hunting, fishing, camping, and shooting gear.

10. OXYCHEM | 264 EMPLOYEES

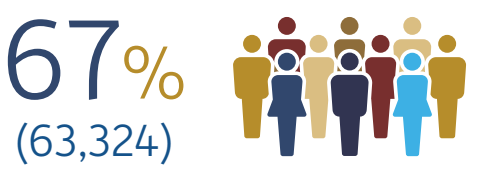
OxyChem is a leading North American Manufacturer of PVC resins, chlorine, and caustic soda – key building blocks of products such as pharmaceuticals, water treatment chemicals, and plastics.

UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS STEADILY DECLINED IN 2020 FOLLOWING THE INITIAL STAY-AT-HOME ORDER DECLARED BY THE GOVERNOR OF LOUISIANA

That order went into place on March 22 and was lifted on May 16. The CARES Act added to unemployment benefit payments for eligible weeks from March 29 to July 25, 2020.

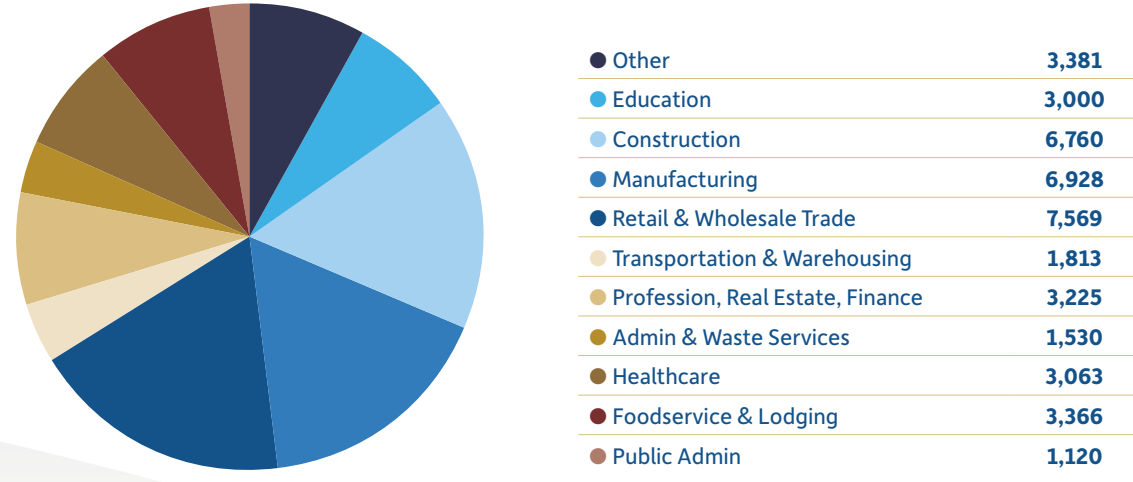


CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE



of the population aged 16+ is in the civilian labor force as of December 2020.

BUSINESSES BY SIZE



Source: Louisiana Workforce Commission

REAL ESTATE

ASCENSION PARISH RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE MARKET SEES MAJOR GROWTH IN 2020

RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS GREW BY 35% OVER 2019

In 2020 in Gonzales, the average construction permit value was \$354k. The average residential permit construction value was \$190k.

THE RESIDENTIAL MARKET WAS STRONG PARISHWIDE

27%

INCREASE IN NEW HOME SALES

26%

GROWTH IN TOTAL RESIDENTIAL HOME SALES VOLUME 2015 - 2020

\$247,990

MEDIAN RESIDENTIAL SALE PRICE

1,100+

NEW HOME PERMITS

RETAIL VACANCY RATE EDGES UP SLIGHTLY

Findings from 12 shopping centers surveyed in the Spring of 2020

\$18/ft

AVERAGE CENTER LEASE PRICE PER SQ. FT. (RENT + REIMBURSABLE)

10%

VACANCY RATE

2%

INCREASE IN VACANCY RATE SINCE SPRING OF 2019

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE MARKET IMPACTED BY COVID IN 2020

With more people working from home, new or renovated office space was evidently not a priority in 2020.

50+

NEW COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION PERMITS PARISHWIDE

35%

DECREASE IN COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION PERMITS IN THE CITY OF GONZALES COMPARED TO 2019



DEVELOPMENT SPOTLIGHT:

HERITAGE CROSSING OFFERS LIVE, WORK, PLAY LIFESTYLE

HERITAGE
— 30 X 44 —
CROSSING



FOSTERING CULTURE AND COMMUNITY, NESTLED IN THE HEART OF GONZALES

Heritage Crossing is a mixed-use development located at the crossroads of Highway 30 and Highway 44 in Gonzales.

Housing options at Heritage Crossing will include single-family, townhomes, condos, and apartments, all in a golf-cart-friendly environment. Businesses and storefronts ranging from medical offices to national retailers, alongside local small businesses and restaurants will line the interior streets, offering locals and visitors alike access to all things necessary for a complete lifestyle experience.

A 30,000 sq. ft. specialty grocery store, Alexander's Heritage Market, is currently under construction. Heritage Crossing will also be home to the "Price Leblanc PACE Center", a premier venue hosting major conferences, events, balls, recitals, competitions and theatrical performances.

Tree-lined walking trails and bike lanes adorn the property, preserving the natural beauty of the land.

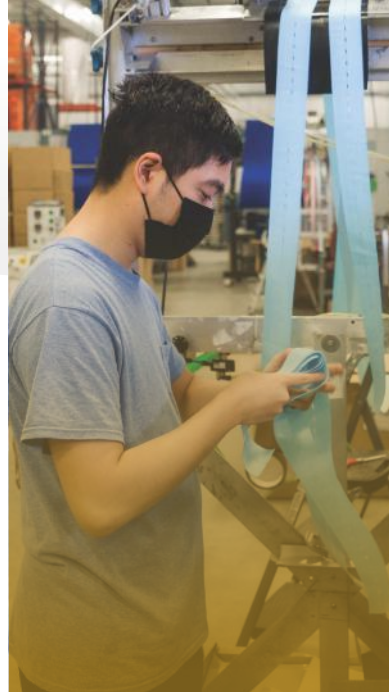
UPDATE ON 2020 GOALS & PROGRESS

GOAL 1: RETAIN & EXPAND ASCENSION'S EXISTING COMPANY FOUNDATION

WE KEPT OUR FOCUS ON SUPPORTING OUR LOCAL EMPLOYERS IN 2020

Our Business Retention (BRE) program offers Ascension employers continuous outreach, problem-solving assistance, and forums to voice their needs. We want to help ensure that businesses survive economic instability, promote job creation, and improve competitiveness.

Business visits are crucial for developing a long-term relationship between the Parish and existing employers. Held in confidentiality with a company's senior leadership, visits help AEDC gain a better understanding of the inner workings and challenges our industries face that we can help mitigate or remove as well as a deeper understanding of the company's products and markets.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS



Louisiana Economic Development



Baton Rouge Area Chamber



Louisiana Workforce Commission



Microbusiness Enterprise Corporation of Ascension



HOW WE SUPPORTED OUR LOCAL EMPLOYERS DURING COVID

22 BRE VISITS IN 2020

There are no restrictions on the type or size of companies we work with because each and every business is important to the local economy. These calls are in addition to the work we do with major employers and businesses that reach out to us directly for help and support.

PROVIDED COVID ASSISTANCE TO 500+ COMPANIES

We were able to assist over 500 businesses with valuable information and resources on disaster relief programs.

TOP 3 BUSINESS CHALLENGES REPORTED BY OUR LOCAL EMPLOYERS

1. COVID
2. DISRUPTIONS IN SUPPLY CHAIN
3. TRAFFIC

TOP 3 BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2020 REPORTED BY OUR LOCAL EMPLOYERS

1. ABILITY TO CONTINUE OPERATING SAFELY DURING COVID
2. NEW PRODUCT LINE DEVELOPMENT
3. ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY

PPP LOANS HELPED RETAIN 25% OF JOBS IN OUR LOCAL LABOR FORCE IN 2020

In 2020, 1,458 Ascension businesses were approved for a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan. This number represented 63% of our total businesses and helped us retain over 16,000 of our local jobs.

13%

OF PPP LOANS WERE BETWEEN \$150K AND \$10 MILLION, RETAINING 9,400 JOBS

87%

OF PPP LOANS WERE UNDER \$150,000

44%

OF PPP LOAN APPLICANTS ARE LOCATED IN THE CITY OF GONZALES

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) is a U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) backed-loan designed to provide a direct incentive for small businesses to keep their workers on the payroll. The SBA will forgive loans if all employee retention criteria are met, and the funds are used for eligible expenses.



UPDATE ON 2020 GOALS & PROGRESS

GOAL 2: GROW OPPORTUNITY

AEDC ACTIVELY WORKED ON 20 PROJECTS IN 2020, ULTIMATELY SECURING 3 PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Despite Covid-19, we received the same number of project leads in 2020 as we did in 2018 and 11 more leads than we did in 2019.



44

NEW LEADS



13

NEW PROJECTS



620

POTENTIAL
NEW JOBS

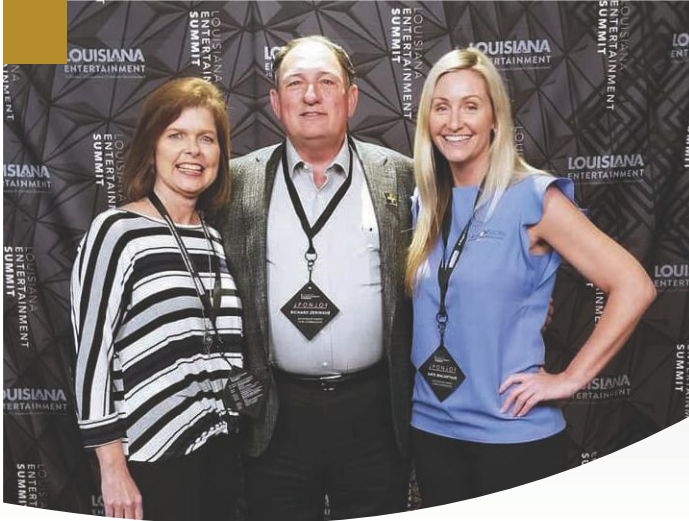


\$1.6 Billion

NEW CAPITAL INVESTMENT

ASCENSION RECEIVED 4 FILMING LOCATION REQUESTS THROUGH FILM ASCENSION

Since the creation of the pioneering motion picture incentive program in 2002, Louisiana has created a robust suite of incentives specifically targeting the entertainment industry. AEDC is part of FilmAscension, an organization dedicated to promoting and locating film projects within the Parish.



ASCENSION BECAME AN ACT WORKREADY COMMUNITY

During the past year, the Ascension Parish School System, Ascension Chamber of Commerce, Donaldsonville Chamber of Commerce, and the Ascension Economic Development Corporation formed a consortium to become an ACT Work Ready Community.

The purpose of Work Ready Communities is to build a sustainable workforce development approach that links education and employment, matches people to jobs, and aligns with economic development. The goal of this initiative is to develop a robust workforce as measured by individuals certifying essential work readiness skills, employers recognizing the skills assessment test and certificate, and policy leaders having real-time information to close skill gaps that economic developers can leverage for economic growth.



HELPED ESTABLISH ASCENSION UNITED TO SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES DURING CRISIS

Ascension United was created as a collaboration between Ascension Parish Tourism Commission, Ascension Chamber of Commerce, Ascension Economic Development, and the Donaldsonville Chamber of Commerce as an initiative to help support our local business in times of crisis.

Visit the website: ascensionunited.net



UPDATE ON 2020 GOALS & PROGRESS

GOAL 3: TELL OUR ASCENSION STORY THROUGH MARKETING & OUTREACH

WE ATTENDED 3 BUSINESS RECRUITMENT EVENTS IN 2020

Part of a targeted marketing strategy to recruit new employers, AEDC visits specific markets and events in an effort to engage directly with key site selection decision-makers. Recruitment events include attending trade shows, networking events, one-on-one company visits, and facility tours. We also partner at events with LED, BRAC, TBIC, Entergy, and other partners to promote Ascension Parish.



2

VIRTUAL RECRUITMENT EVENTS

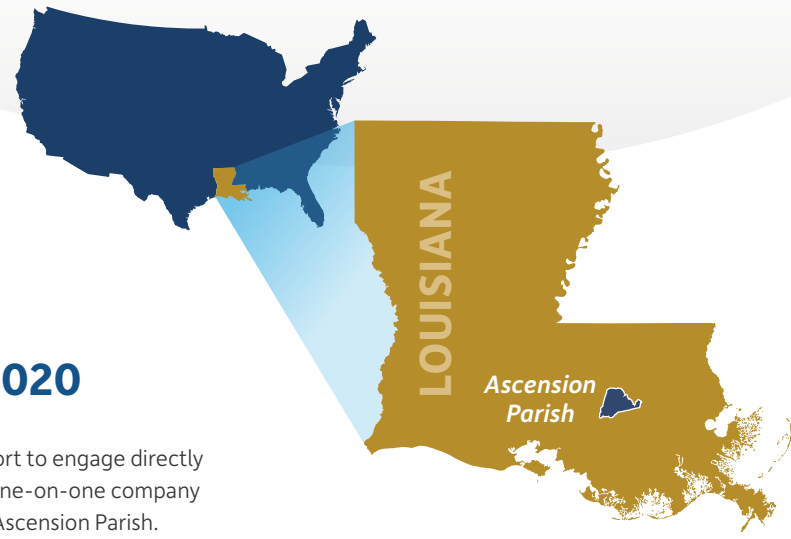
Transatlantic Business & Investment Conference
International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC)
Southern Divisional Meeting



1

IN-PERSON RECRUITMENT EVENT

Washington, DC



WE CONTINUE TO MARKET OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH OUR WEBSITES



ASCENSION'S LED CERTIFIED SITES* WEB PAGE:

3,100 Views

TOP PROPERTY PAGES VISITED IN 2020:

- 1. RiverPlex MegaPark
- 2. Parks Geismar
- 3. Hardtimes Plantation
- 4. Gateway II
- 5. Grezaffi

AEDC WEBSITE:

Over 17,000 Page Views

TOP PAGES VISITED:

- 1. Start a Business in Ascension
- 2. Local Taxes & Fees
- 3. About AEDC

*Certified Sites – Louisiana Economic Development (LED) Certified Sites are development-ready industrial sites. LED certification is granted after an extensive application process and exhaustive review. The benefits of certification include official acknowledgment of a site's suitability and readiness and improved success in the site selection process. The program's rigorous review process is conducted by an independent, third-party engineering firm.

WE HAVE COMMITTED TO ATTEND 5 RECRUITMENT EVENTS STARTING IN JUNE 2021



OUR 2019 ANNUAL REPORT WON A SILVER AWARD AT THE AMERICAN ADVERTISING AWARDS

Working with our partners at Red Sage Communications Inc., AEDC received a Silver Addy for our 2019 Annual Report design and messaging by the American Advertising Federation North Alabama chapter.



OUR PLAN FOR 2021

HOW WE'RE CONTINUING TO GROW
ASCENSION PARISH IN 2021

FOCUS AREA 1:
RECRUITMENT

Build on our chemical industry success while simultaneously recruiting companies from the following industries:



FOCUS AREA 2:
EXPANSION

Industry is the fabric of our community that generates additional business growth.
We will continue to focus on growing our large industry sector, as well as our small businesses and everything in between.



SINCE 2006, AEDC HAS LEVERAGED \$6 MILLION IN INVESTMENT
SUPPORT, GENERATING \$9.1 BILLION IN PRIVATE CAPITAL
INVESTMENT, CREATING AND RETAINING 3,224 JOBS

FOCUS AREA 3:
TELLING THE ASCENSION STORY

Utilize video messaging to promote our business community and our quality of life.



2020 ASCENSION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION BOARD

Kirk Boudreaux, Gonzales City Council

Janet Britton, EATEL

Robert Burgess, Our Lady of the Lake Ascension (Retired)

John Cagnolatti, Ascension Parish Council

Derrick Coco, Eastman Chemical

William Dawson, Dawson Interprizes, Inc.

Don Hanna, Saurage Rotenberg Commercial Real Estate

Roger Keese, Shell Chemical (Retired)

Brent Landry, Donaldsonville Council

Chuck Leblanc, Bourg Insurance

Chase Melancon, Ascension Parish Council

Dwight Poirrier, Attorney at Law

Kevin Schexnayder, Hancock Whitney Bank

Don Schexnayre, Sorrento Council

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