

# P R E S S   R E L E A S E



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## **PORT OF SOUTH LOUISIANA HOSTS HIGHER EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE**

On July 30<sup>th</sup>, the Port of South Louisiana organized and hosted a roundtable discussion, a meeting designed for resident industry representatives to voice their needs from the university system and its graduates. The discussion was part of a series of forums at the request from Senator Norbèrt Chabert to evaluate where education has been, where it is today, and in which direction it needs to go.

University System of Louisiana newly appointed President, Dr. Sandra Woodley, was the featured guest at the meeting, which was held at the Port of South Louisiana’s Guesthouse. Before an audience of managers and human resources representatives, Dr. Woodley gave an overview of her background in education and opened the floor to discussion on what industry sees as the greatest educational gaps. “What worked 30 years ago is not going to work today in the technology, the process control systems, the automation of these plants,” stated Tanya Bourgeois of Mosaic. “It’s requiring a higher degree of high school graduate, a higher degree from the technical college and quite frankly sometimes the technical college alone is just not getting us where we need to be.” The point attendees repeatedly made during the discussion is the importance of universities getting feedback from industry as to what types of positions are available in the community, then adapting the curriculum to fulfill those needs.

Jaime de la Cruz of Marathon suggested that students be exposed at an earlier age to jobs and careers that are available to them within their community. Implanting an interest in them as early as junior high school may have an even greater impact than at the high school level. Organizing cooperative job fairs and improve guidance counselor training were means offered toward achieving that goal.

However, not all higher education issues are related to students already enrolled. Some companies offer education reimbursements programs (for instance, Mosaic has invested over \$1 million in the last two years for training), but many employees do not take advantage, not from a lack of desire but from a shortage of time. According to Tanya Bourgeois of Mosaic, “One thing that the technical colleges have gotten a hold of and offer is the flexibility for those workers to go back to school. I hear a lot of employees express a desire to go back to college but, besides online courses, it is very difficult for the shift worker to obtain that four-year degree working the schedule he works today.”

Some cited the success of university/industry partnerships. For instance, St. James Stevedores partnered with Southeastern University industrial technology students to update some of their technology. This partnership evolved into the development of patents and the hiring of some of these students upon graduation. Senator Chabert spoke of Fletcher Community Technical College, a model which higher education should consider following. “They are literally writing the book on what it means for a two-year institution to partner with business and industry. They are cooperating not only from a

'Hey listen, we need this degree field because these are the jobs that our industry needs filled' but they are doing what industry really needs to be doing and that is sharing in the cost associated with those highly technical degrees."

Following the roundtable exercise, Executive Director Paul Aucoin said "This dialogue is important and we hope the end result of having open and lively discussions like this one will help our Senators and Dr. Woodley better understand the challenges industry is facing to bridge the gap between educational institutions keeping up with changing technologies for the workforce of today."

*In January 2013, Dr. Sandra Woodley was appointed president of the University of Louisiana System, which includes nine universities, serving 92,000 students with a total operating budget of over \$762 million. She gained her experience in policy research, strategic planning, and budgeting in four states -Texas, Arizona, Alabama, and Kentucky- before coming to Louisiana.*



*Pictured L-R: St. Charles Parish President V.J. St. Pierre, Shell's Mike Edwards, Nucor's Jackie McCreary, Valero's Scott Krejci, Senator Norbert Chabert, Dr. Sandra Woodley, Dow's Keith Campo, PSL Executive Director Paul Aucoin, Shell's Barry Roussel, Senator Gary Smith, St. John the Baptist Parish Natalie Robottom, St. James Stevedores' Paul Morton, Marathon's Jaime de la Cruz, Marathon's Sara Guidry, Mosaic's Tanya Bourgeois, Marathon's Megan Hudson, PSL Director of Business Development Linda Prudhomme, and PSL Special Projects Officer Roy Quezaire*



*Senator Norbert Chabert, Dr. Sandra Woodley, and Senator Gary Smith*

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The Port of South Louisiana, a 54-mile port district on the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, is the largest tonnage port in the Western Hemisphere. The cargo it handles accounts for over 50 percent of all Louisiana imports/exports.

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