

# CURRENTS

*first quarter 2024*

BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION

*braf.org*

**1964  
2024**

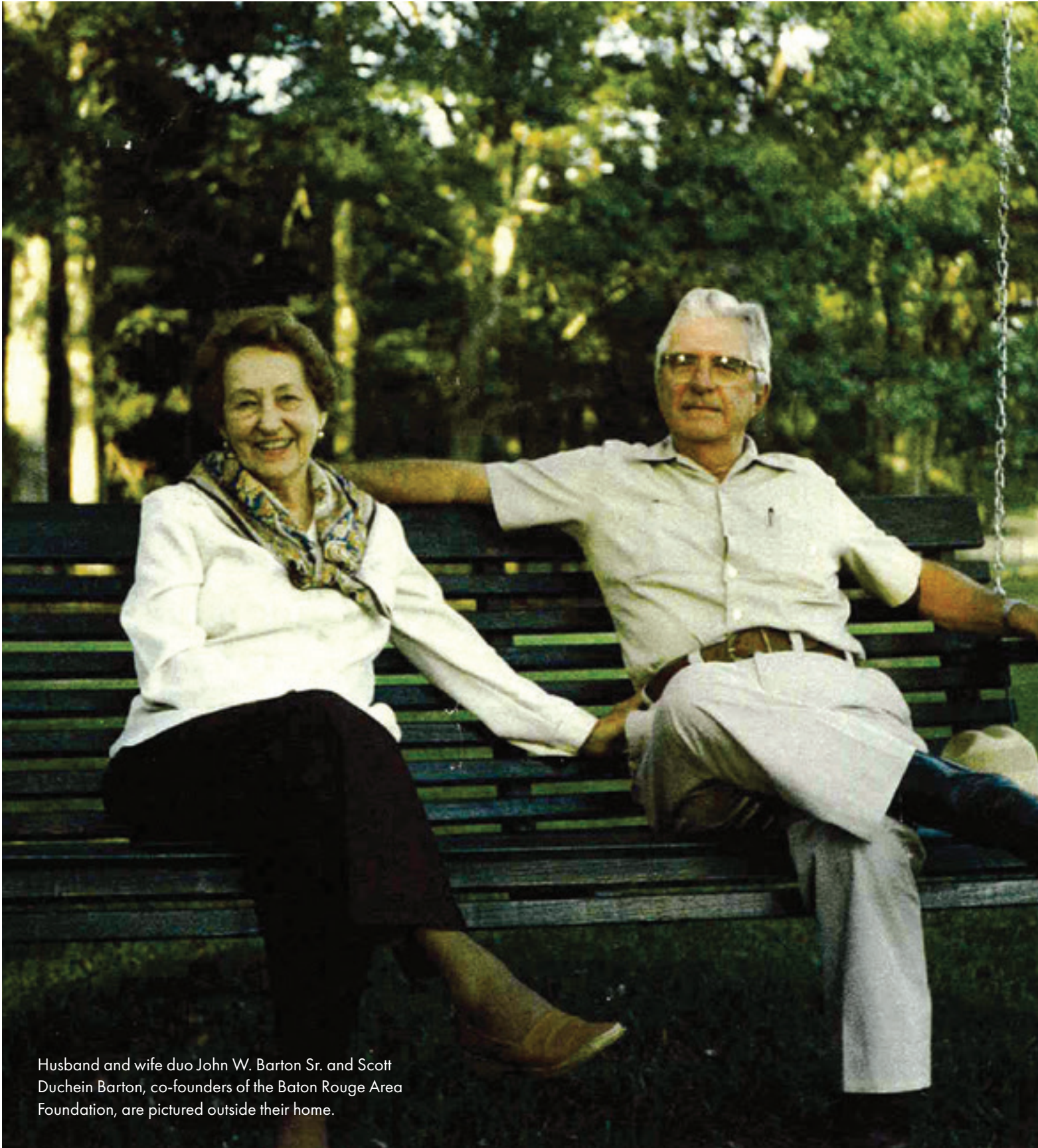
**CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF IMPACT**





## AFRICAN AMERICAN VETERANS MONUMENT

Unveiled in the summer of 2023, Heritage honors Black military service. Located in Veterans Memorial Park adjacent to the Louisiana State Capitol, the bronze cast monument was created by Xavier University professor Sheleen Jones. Depicted are Tuskegee Airmen, Buffalo Soldiers, Lieutenant General Russel Honoré, General Colin Powell, Lieutenant General Michael Langley, Brigadier General Sherian Cadoria, Colonel Margaret Bailey, and others.



Husband and wife duo John W. Barton Sr. and Scott Duchein Barton, co-founders of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, are pictured outside their home.



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# 60 YEARS AGO,

12 visionary leaders  
met in the Capital City  
to establish the  
Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

Their modest investment has since grown  
into a powerful force for community transformation.



## FOUNDERS

(L-R) Charles F. Duchain, George Mathews, Sidney A. Champagne, Henry W. Jolly Jr. MD, John W. Barton Sr., Frank S. Craig Jr., Joseph H. Baynard, Harvey H. Posner, L. Heidel Brown. *Not Pictured:* Douglas L. Manship Sr., Benjamin B. Taylor Jr., Scott Duchain Barton

*Story on page 32*

The Foundation has been dedicated to improving the lives of South Louisiana residents since its inception in 1964.

Looking back at six decades of impact, we acknowledge the pivotal contributions of leaders past and present. Myron Falk served as the Foundation’s inaugural executive director from 1978 to 1988, leaving behind a remarkable legacy. John G. Davies succeeded him, leading the organization for an impressive 33 years as president and CEO. In 2022, Davies retired, passing the leadership torch to Chris Meyer, whose leadership continues to inspire us and propel the Foundation to greater heights. Over the years, the Foundation has become a gathering place for changemakers, leaders, and visionaries committed to achieving societal good.

As the Foundation grew in financial resources and reputation, we took on more complex and impactful community projects. Some of our notable initiatives include the revitalization of downtown through Plan Baton Rouge I and II,



the creation of nonprofits seeking to improve education, quality of life, and medical outcomes, and projects for community betterment like public art restoration and revitalization of the University Lakes. None of these projects would have been possible without the valuable input and support from our community—the backbone of our work.

Today, our Foundation proudly stands as one of the largest community



**OUR DEDICATION  
TO ENGAGING AND  
INSPIRING THE NEXT  
GENERATION REMAINS  
RESOLUTE, SHAPING  
A FUTURE WHERE  
THE FOUNDATION  
CONTINUES TO BE A  
POWERFUL CATALYST  
FOR PROGRESS.**

foundations in the United States, actively collaborating with our community to spearhead diverse initiatives that advance the common good.

Under the leadership of president and CEO Chris Meyer, the Foundation is poised for an energetic future, marking the start of the next 60 years of impact. Our dedication to engaging and inspiring the next generation remains resolute, shaping a future where the Foundation continues to be a powerful catalyst for progress.

As we embark on this exciting path forward, we sincerely thank our donors, board members, partners, members, and community. Together, we have made South Louisiana a better place, and we continue creating opportunities for our bright and thriving future.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey W. Koonce  
Chair



100 NORTH STREET  
SUITE 900  
BATON ROUGE  
LOUISIANA 70802

**BRAF.ORG**  
**225.387.6126**

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# ABOUT US

## About

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation has been dedicated to making a difference in South Louisiana since 1964. With a mission to enhance the quality of life in our region, we unite human and financial resources to drive positive change and foster community growth.

Among the largest community foundations in the country, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation seeks to improve the quality of life in greater Baton Rouge and across South Louisiana.

The Foundation pursues its mission by serving donors to build the assets that drive initiatives and solutions, supporting local nonprofits with strategic consulting to ensure overall impact and sustainability, engaging community leaders to develop appropriate responses to emerging opportunities and challenges, and by partnering with others to leverage collective resources and create the capacity to be a stimulus of positive regional change.

## Our North Star

Our North Star is clear: We strive to build a thriving and resilient future for all in Baton Rouge and beyond. Through strategic initiatives, collaborative partnerships, and thoughtful philanthropy, we work tirelessly to address emerging challenges and opportunities in our community.

## How We Fulfill Our Mission

We pursue our mission through three key avenues:

### 1 Catalyzing change and positive opportunity in our community.

The Foundation leads civic projects with annual support from our members. This work seeks to address the most pressing barriers to opportunity and is guided by data and community need.

### 2 Fostering a strong philanthropic environment.

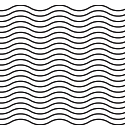
We believe philanthropy is for everyone. The Foundation supports philanthropists at every stage of their journey of giving — providing education, counsel, and tools to help them support nonprofits and

the community at large with their time, knowledge, and resources.

### 3 Empowering changemakers and nonprofits.

Our Center for Nonprofit Excellence provides strategic and technical support to nonprofit organizations. We build relationships with and between nonprofits in our area, connect organizations to funding opportunities, offer consulting services for fundraising and planning, and lead educational fellowships.





TIM MUELLER

## Collaborative effort advances lakes system restoration

PROGRESS CONTINUES ON THE REVITALIZATION of the University Lakes System, thanks to a collaborative effort among LSU, the State of Louisiana, the City-Parish of East Baton Rouge, BREC, and the Foundation. The Foundation sponsored the master planning process in 2014, setting the stage for an ambitious vision that combines environmental restoration with increased recreational value.

The University Lakes Project seeks to enhance the lakes surrounding LSU's campus, mitigating flood risks, improving aquatic and environmental

health, and expanding recreational amenities. To achieve this, the plan calls for deepening the lakes, promoting better drainage, and enhancing safety through improved pathways.

Nearly 100 years ago, swamp land was donated to the city and LSU to create these lakes, which now require excavation and improvement to restore their health and maximize usability. All six lakes, four owned by LSU and two by the City-Parish, are targeted in the restoration.

Several near-term construction milestones have been outlined. The

island near Stanford Avenue in University Lake will be cleared, capped, and landscaped this spring. In the summer, advertisements for bids on May Street improvements and Phase 1 interim landscape will be posted. Initial dredging in City Park Lake and Lake Erie will also be completed during this time. After September, the remaining major work includes dredging the northern portion of University Lake and College Lake in spring 2025 and installing interim landscaping.

## BREC's ambitious master plan enters third phase

BATON ROUGE RECREATION AND PARK COMMISSION is charting a visionary course for the next decade through its strategic systemwide planning initiative, Imagine Your Parks. BREC is gearing up to introduce the third phase of its Systemwide Master Plan this summer, aiming to shape a future guided by equity and sustainability principles.

Phase 1 of Imagine Your Parks began in 2004 and Phase 2 in 2014. Both plans started with gathering initial public feedback to identify and plan transformative projects in partnership with the community. These projects

included BREC's initial 12 community parks, Liberty Lagoon, and other special facilities emphasizing higher quality and better design for parks and facilities.

Now, with Phase 3, BREC shifts its focus to identifying gaps not yet addressed in the first two phases and employing new standards for decision-making to propel new transformational projects forward. This involves redefining goals, assessing financial viability, and considering operational aspects to align with recreational trends for the next decade.

Phase 3 seeks to create a roadmap for the future, focusing its efforts on

implementing park design strategies that improve accessibility and increase a sense of belonging for all community members, curating a sustainable portfolio, strengthening partnerships, enhancing connectivity through off-road greenway trails and blueways, improved community health, and increasing environmental resilience. By integrating equity and sustainability principles, BREC is actively engaging the community in this strategic planning model, paving the way for a more inclusive and sustainable recreational landscape.



LEARN MORE AT [WWW.BREC.ORG/IMAGINEYOURPARKS3](http://WWW.BREC.ORG/IMAGINEYOURPARKS3)





TIM MUELLER

## **COUNCIL APPROVES FUNDING FOR PERKINS UNDERPASS PROJECT**

THE EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH Metro Council has approved a \$2.2 million contract for landscape design to revitalize the Perkins Road Underpass area. The Underpass Project plans to transform the space into a dynamic, multifunctional community area with features such as enhanced parking, communal spaces, landscaping, improved lighting, pedestrian paths, and wayfinding. The design process is set to begin early this year.



Nonprofit Board Fellows graduates

## Foundation graduates more than 50 fellows from development programs

### ▶ DEVELOPMENT FELLOWS

THE FOUNDATION GRADUATED the ninth cohort of Development Fellows in July 2023. This flagship program, facilitated by the Nonprofit Excellence Team, covers crucial aspects of nonprofit development like fundraising, storytelling, marketing, and measuring impact. The program's six-month curriculum aims to positively impact nonprofit organizations by fostering a community of skilled professionals dedicated to making a lasting difference.

### ▶ NONPROFIT BOARD FELLOWS

AT THE CONCLUSION of the Development Fellows program, the Foundation launched a new professional fellowship program, Nonprofit Board Fellows. Offered by the Center for Nonprofit Excellence, this program provides essential skills and tools for effective board leadership in nonprofit organizations. The inaugural cohort comprised 30 leaders who participated in six sessions led by community experts.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CENTER FOR NONPROFIT EXCELLENCE VISIT [WWW.BRAF.ORG/NONPROFITS](http://WWW.BRAF.ORG/NONPROFITS)

**DISASTER RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUND ACTIVATED IN RESPONSE TO WILDFIRES**

LAST YEAR, THE FOUNDATION ACTIVATED its Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund in response to wildfires in Louisiana. The Foundation coordinated with the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana and Central Louisiana Community Foundation to send 64,000 units of hydration packets for firefighters battling the Tiger Island Fire. The ability to provide this aid was made possible through generous donations to the fund from corporate partners and individual donors.

This fund has been an essential resource in addressing various disasters in Louisiana and beyond. Over the years, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation staff has established partnerships with community foundations and nonprofits across the state. Together, we work with local and state officials to identify needs in areas affected by hurricanes, floods, fires, and other disasters. This ensures that philanthropic contributions can reach the most impactful recovery efforts quickly and efficiently.



**SAFEBR COALITION CELEBRATES ONE YEAR OF PROGRESS**

SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT in February 2023, SafeBR has emerged as a leading force dedicated to enhancing public safety in Baton Rouge. Over the past year, the coalition has actively engaged with more than 300 community members and organizations, advocating for lasting safety solutions that can be implemented in the near and long term.

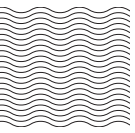
In its inaugural year, SafeBR achieved notable success by uniting community and state leaders to implement impactful initiatives. The Page/Rice Camera project, an initiative of SafeBR and the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, secured funding for over 100 advanced crime cameras, while the Law Enforcement Support Foundation, Boys and

Girls Club of Metro Louisiana, and others hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for the Inspiration Center at Howell Park. The facility will use technology, education, sports, and mentorship to engage local children, while also providing services to families.

At the start of 2024, SafeBR announced it will conduct a Law Enforcement Excellence Study, with the aim of creating a comprehensive roadmap to support and strengthen law enforcement in both the city and parish.



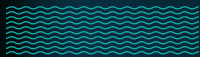
VISIT [SAFEBR.ORG](https://www.safebr.org) TO JOIN THE COALITION AND STAY UP TO DATE ON THEIR PROGRESS.



# Northshore Community Foundation

*A legacy of growth & vision for the future*

**I**n a pivotal moment for the Northshore Community Foundation, Susan Bonnett Bourgeois, a dedicated leader of two decades, concluded her role as CEO last year, marking the end of an era. As the organization transitions, Leslie Landry steps into the role of CEO, bringing a promise of a bright future for NCF.



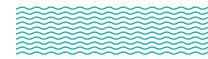
## SUSAN BONNETT BOURGEOIS 15 years of philanthropic leadership

IN 2006, SUSAN ASSUMED LEADERSHIP of the Covington-based organization, entrusted with its establishment and growth. Throughout the years, she played a pivotal role in elevating the foundation from a conceptual “good idea” to a significant force for good and a regional thought leader. Last year Susan, recognizing NCF was in a position of strength, passed on the leadership reins to Leslie Landry. Emphasizing the importance of ensuring the organization’s continued strength and growth for the next generation, Susan spoke highly of Leslie’s aptitude for leading the foundation into the future. Although Susan stepped down from the CEO post, she remains committed to supporting the organization through the transition and beyond.





TIM MUELLER



## LESLIE SPENCER LANDRY

### Embracing the vision for the future

HAVING SERVED AS Susan's second in command since 2018, Leslie is well-prepared to take on her new role of CEO. With an MBA from the University of Southern Mississippi and experience as the director of development for the Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center in Covington, Landry brings a wealth of expertise to the challenge. She envisions leading NCF into new and unconventional spaces, positioning the foundation at the forefront of ambitious projects and opportunities to better serve the community. Landry graciously acknowledges Susan for her leadership and extraordinary strategic vision.

Under Leslie's leadership, the Northshore Community Foundation is poised for a new chapter, continuing its legacy of making a positive impact on the Northshore.

The Northshore Community Foundation, established in 2007, aims to unite human and financial resources to enhance the quality of life in the Northshore, serving St. Tammany, St. Helena, Washington, and Tangipahoa parishes.



TIM MUELLER

# Q&A

## LESLIE LANDRY ON TRANSITIONING LEADERSHIP

**Currents: How has your experience as vice president of the Northshore Community Foundation influenced your vision for the organization as its newly appointed CEO?**

Landry: "Through my tenure, and under the leadership of Susan, I've gained valuable insights into creative ways to couple strategy and philanthropy to address needs, challenges, and opportunities present within our community. This understanding has

shaped my vision to further elevate the Foundation's role as a catalyst for positive change, fostering a more prosperous Northshore region."

**What key strategic initiatives do you plan to implement to further enhance the impact and reach of NCF?**

"I am focused on intentional engagement with fundholders, educating them on unique ways their philanthropy can make a big difference.

I want to expand partnerships with local businesses, provide focused support to nonprofits and government agencies, and implement targeted programs to address emerging community needs."

**What areas or issues do you believe require special attention or improvement to better serve the Northshore community?**

"Enhancing our capacity to address issues such as poverty, education, and disaster-related events, to name a few, will remain a priority. We plan to: collaborate closely with community stakeholders; conduct, participate in, and administer needs assessments; and develop innovative solutions that empower individuals and organizations to create lasting change."

**How do you envision fostering collaboration and partnerships with other organizations, both locally and regionally, to strengthen NCF's mission and community impact?**

"I envision establishing strategic alliances with like-minded organizations, sharing resources, expertise, and best practices to maximize our collective impact and more effectively address complex community challenges."

**What excites you most about the future of NCF?**

"We are a young Foundation, and I see the Northshore having tremendous potential. I am excited to tap into growth opportunities and expand the Foundation in innovative ways. Our founding CEO, Susan has positioned this organization in the best way possible and, for me, I have been gifted a strong organization to lead with an even stronger Board of Directors supporting our work. " ■





# Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana

***\$40 million Choice Neighborhoods implementation grant poised to transform Lake Charles***

LAST SUMMER the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, in collaboration with the "Just Imagine SWLA" initiative, secured a \$40 million Choice Neighborhoods implementation grant, making Lake Charles one of only eight locations in the country to receive the prestigious award. This grant is a vital component of the "Just Imagine SWLA" community upliftment strategy, which seeks to address housing disparities and create a more equitable and vibrant community.

The grant will be used to redevelop Lloyd Oaks and the Mid City neighborhood, replacing 240 distressed housing units with 550 new, high-quality, mixed-income units and promoting community development through the creation of spaces for residents to thrive. The project also includes community spaces, a fitness center, green spaces, parks, access to

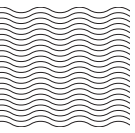
quality schools, and economic hubs that will contribute to local prosperity.

Approximately \$278 million in additional resources will be unlocked for the project to complement federally funded dollars, with funding for construction sourced from low-income housing tax credits. The project aims to create a mix of housing options, including units for up to 80% of the area median income and market-rate units. The focus is on integrating different income levels, setting a precedent for other communities.

Public safety is a top priority in this transformation, with measures in place to create a secure environment that fosters physical and emotional well-being. The initiative is a testament to the careful planning and dedication of the diverse team of partners involved in the project.

This multifaceted approach showcases the commitment of the Community Foundation, the "Just Imagine" process, and its diverse team of partners to create a sustainable and inclusive community. The infusion of resources and strategic planning sets the stage for a comprehensive and lasting impact on the region, fostering a community where all residents can thrive and envision a brighter future.

Lake Charles is now at the forefront of national urban revitalization efforts, and as the construction and revitalization progress, it stands poised to emerge as a shining example of what collaborative effort and vision can achieve in urban development.



# OPPORTUNITY DATA PROJECT

## THE BATON ROUGE AREA

**FOUNDATION** has joined forces with Common Good Labs to launch the Opportunity Data Project, an innovative initiative that leverages data science to identify specific areas in need of philanthropic and social impact efforts. Through the Opportunity Data Project, BRAF and CGL will utilize advanced data analysis techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the community and direct resources and support to areas that require the most attention. By examining various data points, including economic indicators, education levels, healthcare access, and social disparities, the project will identify key areas where targeted interventions can make a significant difference.

The project aims to use new data and analytical tools to identify ways to measure and improve areas of opportunity in the Capital Region. The following brief, titled *The Geography of Opportunity*, offers analyses of Baton Rouge's current performance based on poverty levels in local neighborhoods and other data related to each of the six data-informed pillars of opportunity: economic prosperity, excellent education, strong and safe neighborhoods, healthy families, quality of life, and resilient communities. Over the next few years, a series of papers taking a deeper dive into the data behind each of the pillars detailed will be released. These papers will help our community understand how to leverage data to change the landscape of opportunity for all citizens.



# The geography of opportunity in Baton Rouge

RESEARCHED BY COMMON GOOD LABS

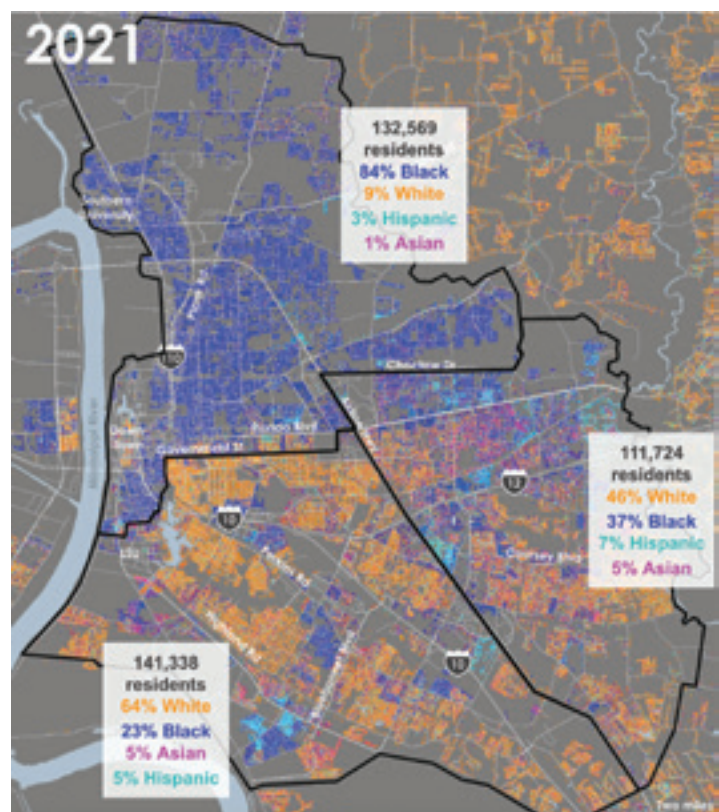
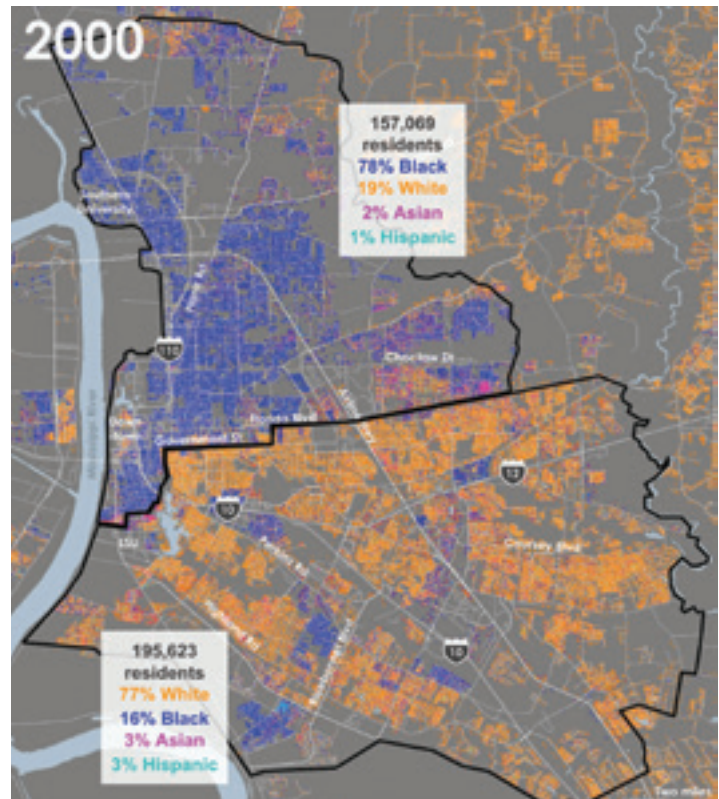
## HOW CAN DATA HELP US UNDERSTAND BATON ROUGE?

When local residents talk about the community they often divide it into two demographic regions: North Baton Rouge, which encompasses neighborhoods in and around the northern part of the city and is considered majority Black; and South Baton Rouge, which includes areas in the southern parts of the parish and is considered majority White.<sup>1</sup>

However, new data suggests the traditional way of describing Baton Rouge does not match the current reality. The bottom map shows the most recent population data for the community. The outlined areas north of LSU, Government Street, and Choctaw Drive are still majority Black; and those south of LSU and Government Street, and west of Airline Highway, remain majority White.<sup>2</sup>

But analyses indicate a third region of the community has emerged.<sup>3</sup> This area is neither majority Black or White. Instead, it is highly diverse, with residents from different racial and ethnic groups often living next door to each other. “Eastern Baton Rouge,” for lack of a better name, includes the neighborhoods east of Airline Highway and south of Choctaw. Around 37% of residents in this area are Black and 46% are White. The region is also home to significant numbers of Hispanic and Asian residents, many of whom have immigrated to Louisiana from countries such as Honduras, Mexico, and Vietnam.

**Demographics of Baton Rouge:**  
Each dot represents one resident of the city and surrounding areas, classified by their race or ethnicity.



The demographic comparisons on the previous page are one example of the ways that data can help local residents better understand the Baton Rouge community. The rest of this brief will use similar sources of information and analytical techniques to examine access to opportunity in the Capital Region.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation and local stakeholders recently identified **six key pillars of opportunity** in the Capital Region:



## HEALTHY FAMILIES

Baton Rouge's health outcomes are among the fastest improving in our country

## EXCELLENT EDUCATION

Every child has excellent learning options from cradle to career so they can unlock and fulfill their potential



## ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Members of our community achieve meaningful upward mobility, and Baton Rouge becomes a magnet to attract talent to our community

## QUALITY OF LIFE

Baton Rouge is the best place to live and work



## STRONG & SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

Every corridor has a plan to spur investment, improve safety, and secure quality housing

## REGIONAL RESILIENCY

We don't wait on the next crisis to prepare and strengthen our infrastructure and community ties



**Opportunity and neighborhood poverty are closely linked in East Baton Rouge Parish**

Researchers have found that growing up in a neighborhood with high rates of poverty significantly reduces children’s opportunities later on in life. It causes them to earn less money as adults, become less likely to complete college,

and be more likely to go to prison.<sup>4</sup> Data shows this is particularly true in East Baton Rouge Parish. As the illustration below shows, growing up in a poor neighborhood can be more harmful than growing up in a poor family.<sup>5</sup> A local child who grew up in a low-income family and a middle- or upper-income neighborhood went on to earn around \$34,000 as a young adult, on average.

A local child who grew up in a middle-

income family and a poor neighborhood went on to earn less than \$30,000. Opportunity continues to be closely related to neighborhood poverty and wealth in Louisiana’s capital. As the analyses in the rest of this brief will illustrate, residents’ access to many of the six pillars of opportunity often depends on where they live.



## Neighborhood poverty in Baton Rouge follows a patchwork pattern

It is possible to use data on local poverty rates to classify residential areas within East Baton Rouge Parish into four categories or segments.<sup>6\*</sup>

**#1. Neighborhoods where poverty is relatively low.** These are areas where less than 30% of residents are poor. Around three-fourths of neighborhood residents in the parish currently live in this segment.

**#2. Neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated, but decreasing.** These are places where 30 to 50% of residents live in poverty, but poverty has declined by 10 percentage points or more since 2011. One in 20 neighborhood residents live in these areas.

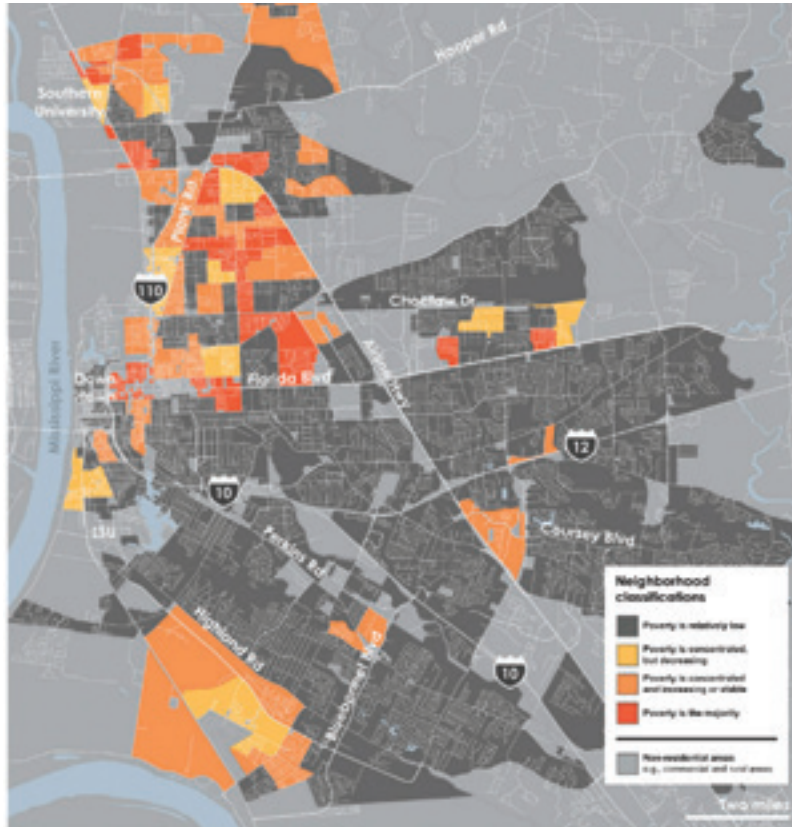
**#3. Neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated, and increasing or stable.** These are places where poverty rates are between 30 and 50% and have been flat or growing in the last decade. Around 1 in 8 local neighborhood residents live in this segment.

**#4. Neighborhoods where poverty is the majority.** Over half of residents in these areas live in poor households. About 1 in 12 local neighborhood residents live in these areas.

The map on the right illustrates how wealth and poverty form a patchwork pattern across Baton Rouge. Many neighborhoods with relatively low poverty are adjacent to places with concentrated poverty and even areas where poor households are the majority. This pattern can influence local residents' access to opportunity across the six pillars identified by local stakeholders.

## Poverty in East Baton Rouge Parish

The colors below classify each local neighborhood into one of four segments based on its poverty levels and trends.



Neighborhood segment performance

Poverty is...	Relatively low	Concentrated but decreasing	Concentrated and increasing or stable	The majority
Residents in households with incomes below the poverty line	10%	34%	38%	63%
Total population	267,000	12,000	38,000	24,000

Source: Analyses of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2021.

\* The government defines someone as poor if they live in a household that earns less than the federal poverty threshold, which varies depending on the number of people in a household. For example, in 2022 a family of four was considered poor if they earned less than \$29,678 and a single person was considered poor if they earned less than \$15,225.

Note: Around 110,000 residents of East Baton Rouge Parish live outside of local neighborhoods, primarily in less dense, rural areas and on college campuses.

**PILLAR #1: ECONOMIC PROSPERITY**

# Middle- and upper-income families are found across Baton Rouge, but are less common in areas with very high poverty.

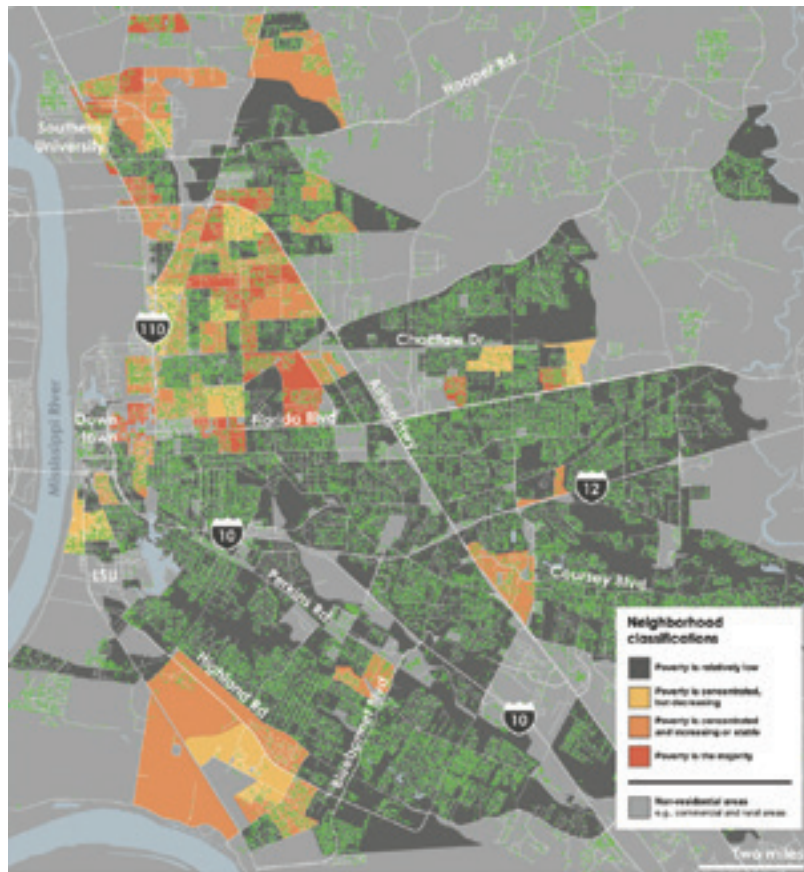
**MIDDLE- AND UPPER-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS**

One of the best ways to measure economic prosperity in neighborhoods is to examine how many people live in middle- or upper-income households — defined in this analysis as earning twice as much as the federal poverty threshold or more. This would be equivalent to a family of four earning around \$60,000 or more in 2022, and would include around 72% of people in the United States.†

Data indicates that people can be economically prosperous in every part of East Baton Rouge Parish. Middle- and upper-income families are found in every neighborhood. They are most prevalent in areas where poverty is low, but even in the two segments with concentrated poverty there are about as many middle- and upper-income families as there are families in poverty.<sup>7</sup>

The only areas where these higher-earning families are relatively rare are neighborhoods where poverty is the majority. In these places, only around 2 in 10 residents are middle- or upper-income. The local unemployment rate in these neighborhoods is also estimated to be at almost 20%.

*\*† Households earning more than the poverty threshold (equivalent to \$29,678 for a family of four in 2022), but less than this \$60,000 threshold would be considered “low income but not poor,” which is generally analogous to the population referred to as “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed” (ALICE). ALICE households are not poor, but they still face considerable challenges affording basic expenses, such as housing, child care, and food.*



**NEIGHBORHOOD SEGMENT PERFORMANCE**

Poverty is...	Relatively low	Concentrated but decreasing	Concentrated and increasing or stable	The majority
Residents in households with incomes at least two times greater than the poverty line	72%	35%	38%	23%
Unemployment rate	6%	14%	11%	19%

Source: Analyses of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2021.

*The green dots represent the locations of households with income at least two times greater than the poverty threshold, which is equivalent to around \$60,000 or more for a family of four.*





**PILLAR #2: EXCELLENT EDUCATION**

# Public elementary schools in almost every part of Baton Rouge are struggling to teach children to read.

## SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN THIRD GRADE LITERACY

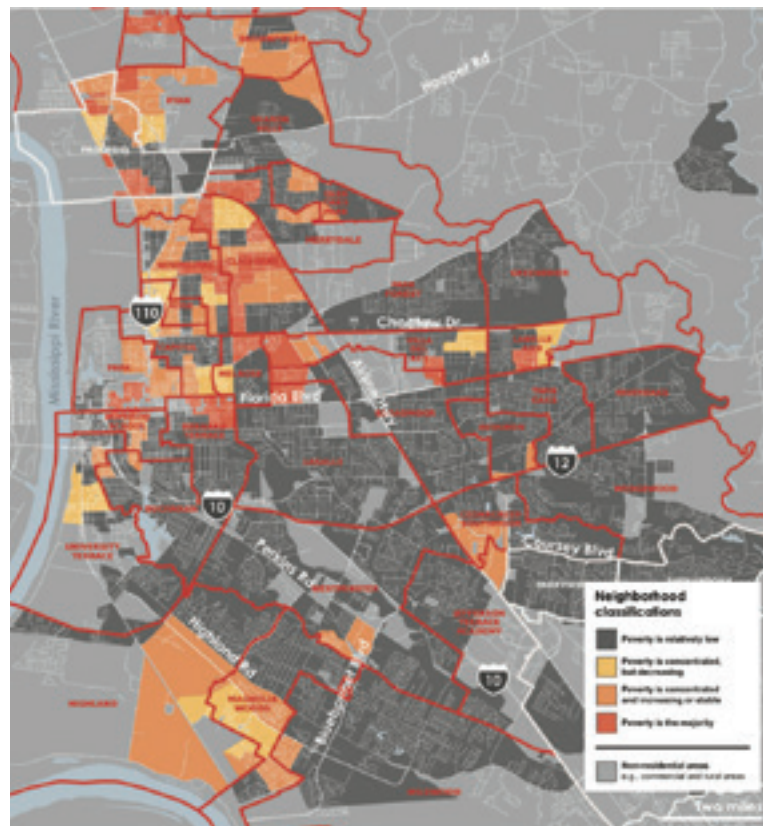
Reading is the foundation for learning every other subject. As experts have noted, from kindergarten through third-grade children must learn to read because after third grade they must read to learn. Failure to read by the end of third grade is associated with higher rates of dropping out of high school and future anti-social behavior in students.<sup>8</sup>

This means that one of the most important ways to measure educational opportunity is to examine how students perform on third-grade literacy tests. As the map illustrates, over half of elementary-aged children in the parish who attend public schools are zoned to attend a school with a “D” or “F” in third-grade literacy.<sup>‡</sup>

Even in areas with low poverty, children are not guaranteed access to schools with a strong track record in teaching reading.<sup>9</sup> These problems are compounded by other factors, particularly in areas where poverty is the majority. In these areas, more than one in four local adults do not have a high school diploma, suggesting that many local parents may have limited ability to support children academically.<sup>10</sup>

*‡ Magnet schools and a number of charter schools tend to perform better, but do not have the capacity to enroll every public school student.*

*Red outlines highlight the attendance zones of neighborhood elementary schools with a “D” or “F” on the most recent third-grade literacy exams as measured by the Louisiana Department of Education. White outlines indicate a grade of “C” or higher.*



### NEIGHBORHOOD SEGMENT PERFORMANCE

Poverty is...	Relatively low	Concentrated but decreasing	Concentrated and increasing or stable	The majority
Elementary-aged children enrolled in public school and living in the attendance zone of a school with a “D” or “F” in 3rd grade literacy	55%	81%	76%	74%
Proportion of adults over 25 years old without a high school diploma	7%	20%	18%	28%

Source: Analyses of data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2021) and the East Baton Rouge Parish School System (2022).

**PILLAR #3: HEALTHY FAMILIES**

# Children have lower expected lifespans in poor neighborhoods within Baton Rouge.

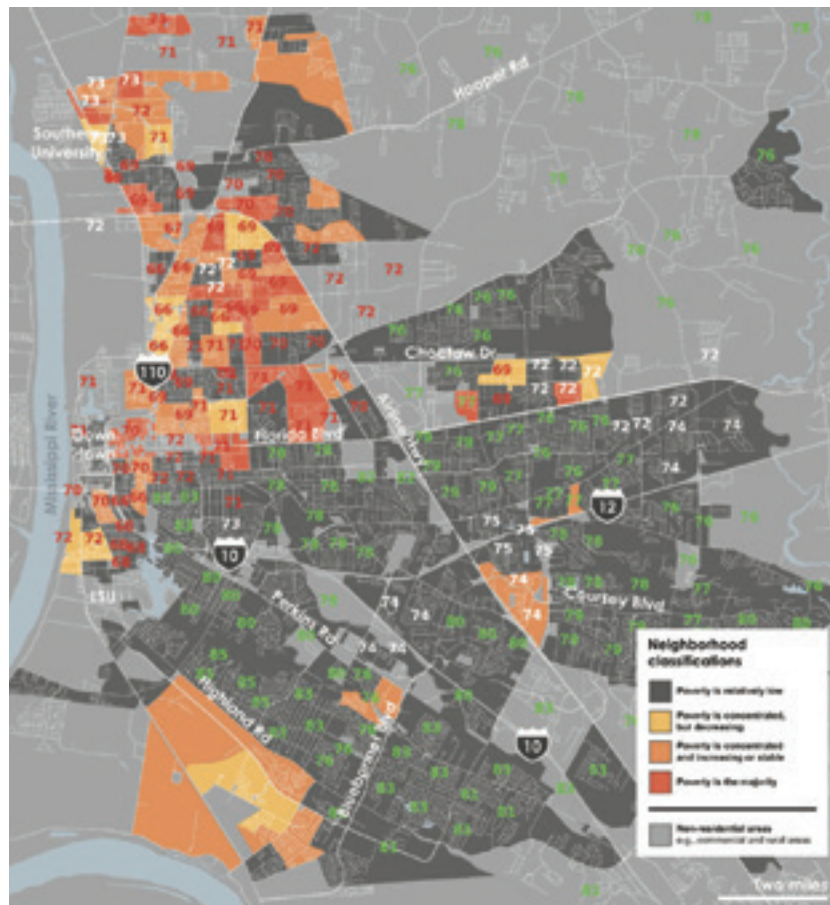
**AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY OF LOCAL CHILDREN**

The expected lifespan of a child in elementary school is 76 years in the average U.S. neighborhood. In the parts of East Baton Rouge Parish where poverty is relatively low, local children are projected to live one year longer than the national average.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, those in the other three segments are projected to live to just 70 or 71. This means that children in local neighborhoods with higher rates of poverty are projected to die six to seven years earlier than those in areas with low rates of poverty, on average.

Estimates also show that rates of several chronic diseases among adults are common in all four neighborhood segments. However, rates of high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes are especially high in areas with greater poverty rates. In places where poverty is concentrated or in the majority, there are 100 or more expected cases of these three conditions for every 100 adults.<sup>12</sup>

*The numbers to the right represent the number of years the average elementary-aged child in each neighborhood is expected to live.*



NEIGHBORHOOD SEGMENT PERFORMANCE				
Poverty is...	Relatively low	Concentrated but decreasing	Concentrated and increasing or stable	The majority
Average years of life expectancy for elementary-aged children	77	70	71	71
Estimated cases of obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes per 100 adults	81	104	100	113

Source: Analyses of data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2021) and the Centers for Disease Control.

**PILLAR #4: QUALITY OF LIFE**

**Resident retention is high in neighborhoods with low poverty. Poorer areas are losing population.**

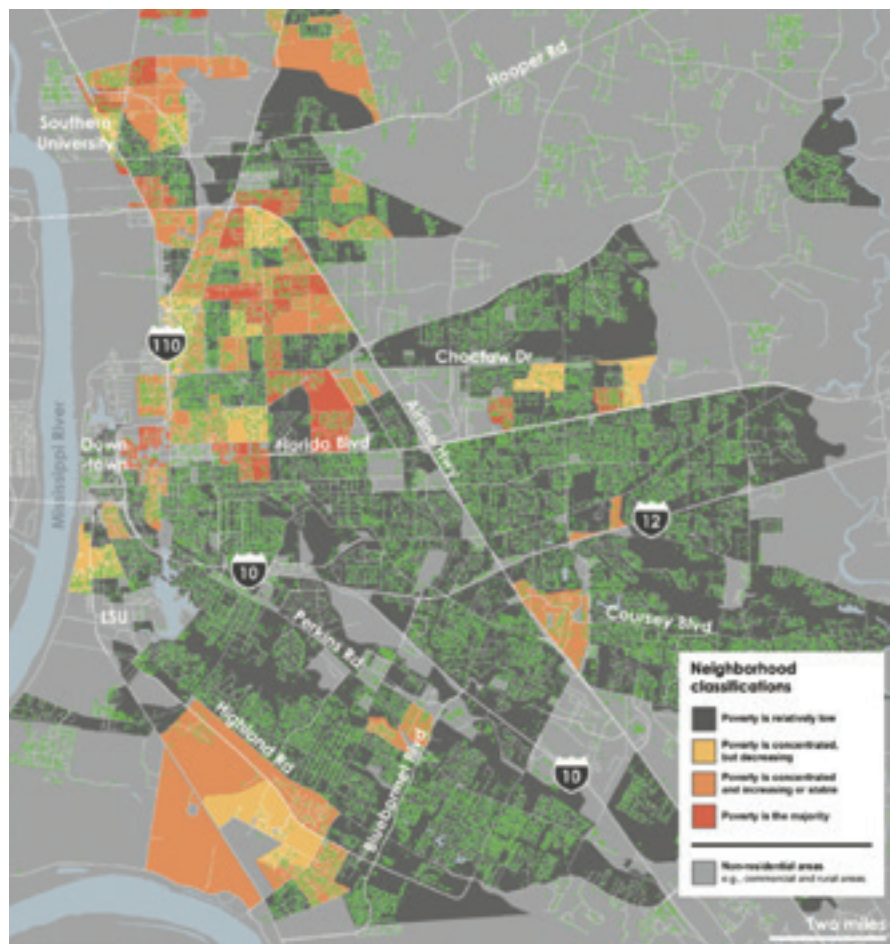
**RESIDENT RETENTION IN LOCAL NEIGHBORHOODS**

One of the clearest ways to measure how satisfied people are with local quality of life is to examine how many of them choose to move. The map on the right illustrates resident retention within local neighborhoods by highlighting residents who lived in the same home in 2010 and 2021.

Once again, there are differences between the segments of neighborhoods in the parish. Resident retention in areas with low poverty is roughly equal to the U.S. average, despite the fact that many local families were displaced by the 2016 Flood. These neighborhoods also experienced moderate population growth.<sup>13</sup>

In areas with concentrated poverty or where poverty is in the majority, rates of resident retention are significantly lower. In addition, each of these segments experienced decreases in their overall population.

When local residents leave a neighborhood, it is not possible to track where they are moving to using the data that is currently available. National research indicates that low-income families are more likely to rent and move more frequently than wealthier households. Since the overall poverty levels for the parish have been relatively stable over the last decade and areas with low poverty rates also saw little change, it is likely that most poor families that move are going from one area with concentrated poverty to another.



**NEIGHBORHOOD SEGMENT PERFORMANCE**

Poverty is...	Relatively low	Concentrated but decreasing	Concentrated and increasing or stable	The majority
Residents who lived at the same address in 2010 and 2021	43%	34%	38%	28%
Population change from 2010 to 2021	+9%	-15%	-3%	-3%

*Green dots represent residents who lived at the same address in 2010 and 2021.*

*Source: Analyses of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2021.*

**PILLAR #5: STRONG AND SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS**

# Almost all neighborhoods in Baton Rouge face challenges with violent crime.

## GUN VIOLENCE INCIDENTS FROM 2019-2022

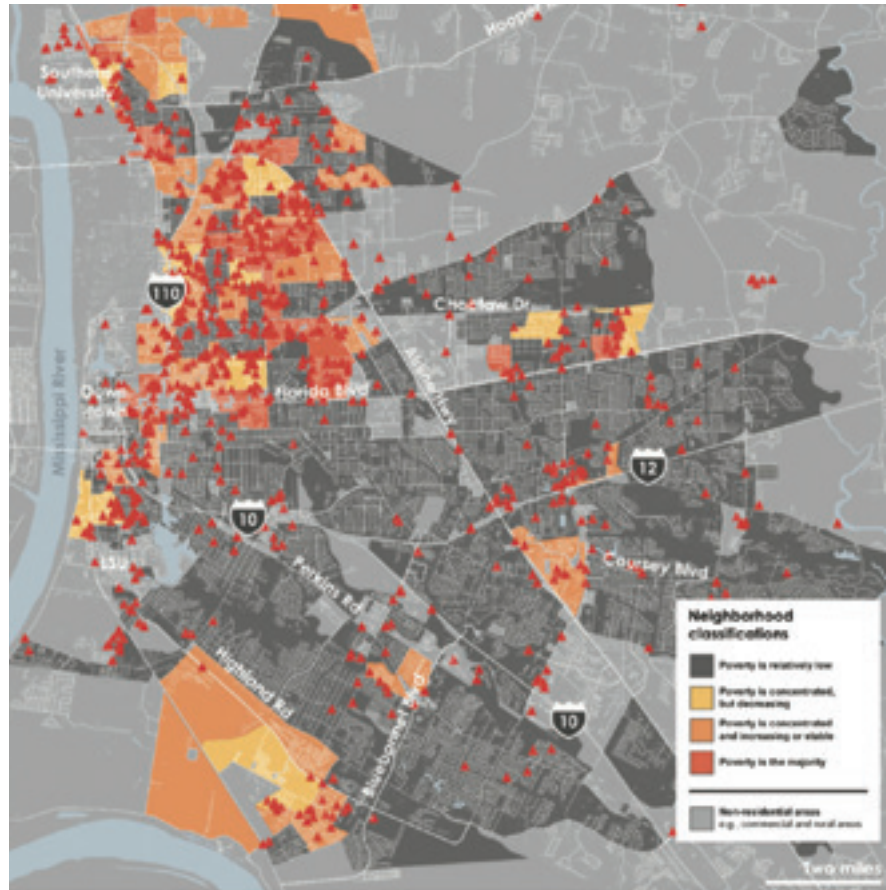
As many local residents already recognize, even relatively wealthy neighborhoods in the city struggle with violent crime. Almost every neighborhood in the city experienced a shooting during the last four years.<sup>14</sup>

Neighborhoods with higher rates of poverty deal with even more gun violence than other neighborhoods. On a per-capita basis, these places have three to four times more shootings than other residential areas of the parish.

Data from the Baton Rouge Police Department can help to compare violence in the City of Baton Rouge to other parts of the country. Each year, there are around six homicides per every 100,000 residents in the United States, and about 12 homicides per 100,000 residents in large U.S. cities.<sup>15</sup>

In local neighborhoods with low poverty rates there were over 20 homicides per 100,000 residents. In the areas with high rates of poverty, there were more than 80 murders per 100,000 residents on average in 2021 and 2022.<sup>16</sup>

*Each red triangle shares the location of a shooting reported in the media during the previous four years.*



### NEIGHBORHOOD SEGMENT PERFORMANCE

Poverty is...	Relatively low	Concentrated but decreasing	Concentrated and increasing or stable	The majority
Shootings per 100,000 residents, average of 2019 to 2022	40	190	111	176
Homicides per 100,000 residents, average of 2021 and 2022 (City of Baton Rouge only)	22	84	83	80

Source: Analyses of data from the Gun Violence Archive (2019-2022), the Baton Rouge Police Department, and the U.S. Census Bureau (2021).



**PILLAR #6: REGIONAL RESILIENCY**

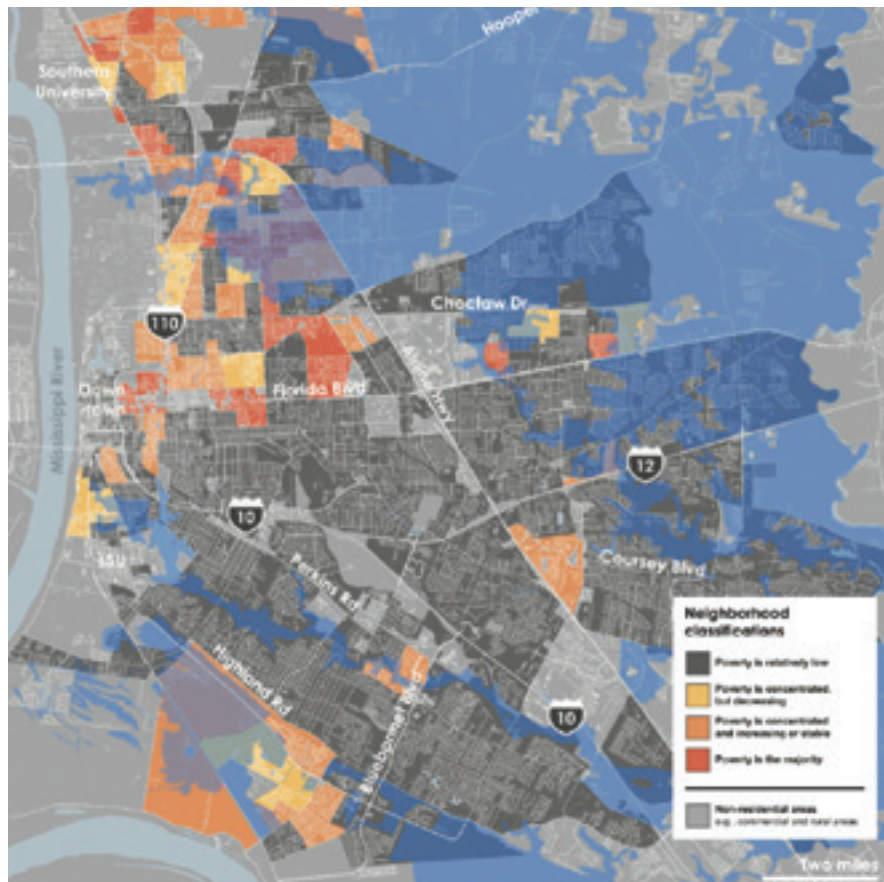
**The 2016 Flood demonstrated that both wealthy and poor areas of the parish face environmental risks.**

**NEIGHBORHOODS AFFECTED BY THE 2016 FLOOD**

Data on the number of local neighborhood residents who lived in homes exposed to the 2016 Flood can be used to assess regional resiliency. More than 40,000 buildings in the parish were damaged by this natural disaster.<sup>17</sup>

As the map on the right reveals, threats caused by stormwater are a shared challenge across East Baton Rouge Parish. Between 19% and 24% of residents in each segment lived in areas that were flooded in 2016.<sup>18</sup>

The damage caused by the flood illustrates the challenges of climate resiliency for local residents. Events like these have immediate consequences for residents who are displaced and who need to make major repairs to their homes. They can also have additional consequences in later years by increasing the local cost of living if home and building insurance becomes more expensive to acquire.



**NEIGHBORHOOD SEGMENT PERFORMANCE**

Poverty is...	Relatively low	Concentrated but decreasing	Concentrated and increasing or stable	The majority
Estimated proportion of population living in homes affected by the 2016 Flood	19%	20%	24%	20%

Source: Analyses of data from EBRGIS Open Data and the U.S. Census Bureau, 2021.

## Conclusion

Most people in Baton Rouge live in places where access to opportunity is relatively high. Around 74 percent of residents in local neighborhoods live in areas with low poverty. People in these areas often experience outcomes that are similar to the national average or better.

**However, there are three universal problems in Baton Rouge: gaps in educational access, crime, and lack of climate resiliency.** Residents in almost every neighborhood lack access to public elementary schools with strong track records for teaching reading. Even many of the wealthiest areas of the community have homicide rates that are above the national average and face significant threats due to stormwater.

Neighborhoods with high rates of poverty must face these universal problems in the community while also dealing with additional challenges related to economic opportunity, lifelong health, and quality of life. People in these neighborhoods have greater rates of unemployment. The expected lifespan of local children is shorter and resident retention in these neighborhoods is also lower than in the rest of the parish.

## Endnotes

*1 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the U.S. Census Bureau.*

*2 Ibid.*

*3 Ibid.*

*4 The Opportunity Atlas: Mapping the Childhood Roots of Social Mobility (Chetty, Friedman, Hendren, Jones, and Porter).*

*5 Common Good Labs analyses of data from Opportunity Insights at Harvard University.*

*6 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the U.S. Census Bureau.*

*7 Ibid.*

*8 What does the research say about the relationship between reading proficiency by the end of third grade and academic achievement, college retention, college and career readiness, incarceration, and high school dropout? Institute of Education Sciences.*

*9 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the East Baton Rouge Parish School System.*

*10 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the American Community Survey.*

*11 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the Centers for Disease Control.*

*12 Ibid.*

*13 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the U.S. Census Bureau.*

*14 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the Gun Violence Archive.*

*15 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the Crime Data Explorer, Federal Bureau of Investigation.*

*16 Common Good Labs analyses of Baton Rouge Police Department data from OpenBR.*

*17 How much damage did the August 2016 flood do? Data becomes clearer, but gaps remain (Stole).*

*18 Common Good Labs analyses of data from the American Community Survey and EBRGIS Open Data.*

Scan here to learn more about the Opportunity Data Project and read the next briefing.





# MOVING FORWARD GIVING BACK

## Building a community where everyone belongs and can thrive

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is dedicated to building a thriving and resilient future for all in Baton Rouge and beyond. We gathered feedback from hundreds of community members to create our Opportunity Agenda, which focuses our work in **six key areas** to drive meaningful impact for *and with* our community.

This agenda builds on our legacy of 60 years of community transformation, and guides our ambitious goals for the decades ahead. Generous members and donors at the Foundation help drive profound and lasting change that generates a stronger and more vibrant community. Through collective philanthropy, we can move our community forward by giving back.

### Drivers of opportunity:

- 1 Economic prosperity
- 2 Excellent education
- 3 Healthy families
- 4 Quality of life
- 5 Strong & safe neighborhoods
- 6 Regional resiliency

*Help us maximize the potential of our community by becoming a member today.*



[braf.org/membership](https://braf.org/membership)

 **BATON ROUGE  
AREA FOUNDATION**

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF IMPACT

1964  
2024

John S. Barton and the 11 other founders of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation knew they wanted to make life a little better in Baton Rouge. They did not know, and almost certainly did not imagine, the ways big and small it would do that over the next 60 years.

They did not know it would bring green space, hope, and millions of dollars in new housing to Old South Baton Rouge.

They did not know the Foundation would one day take a leading role in disaster recovery, help companies support their employees in times of crisis, or stand up a state-of-the-art automotive-training center to prepare young people for well-paying, high-demand work.

They did not know it would help open a crisis center to keep people struggling with mental illness and substance abuse out of jail and into treatment.

They could not have imagined that prosecutors, public defenders and other criminal justice experts would come together to reduce incarceration and

more quickly return nonviolent offenders to their families and their lives.

They could not have imagined a withering downtown transformed by stunning architecture, new public gathering places, and \$2 billion in public and private investment or that a world-renowned biomedical research center would rise in the middle of town.

They did not imagine its work could imbue its community with the idea that, for Baton Rouge, anything is possible.

It's probably safe to say that John S. Barton and those 11 co-founders would have been thrilled and eager to know what the next 60 years would bring.







## FOUNDING

# JUNE 11, 1964

## ESTABLISHMENT

John Barton and 11 other civic leaders determined to make life better in Baton Rouge gather with dreams and ambitions to launch the Foundation in a downtown office.

Over six decades, the Foundation will make life better through initiatives and giving focused on the arts, schools, science, housing, health, and rebirth of the downtown cityscape.

Its work will be of endless variety, from purchasing an EMS ambulance to restoring the city's lakes to helping rebuild lives and communities after Hurricane Katrina.

## FOUNDERS

(L-R) Charles F. Duchain, George Mathews, Sidney A. Champagne, Henry W. Jolly Jr. MD, John W. Barton Sr., Frank S. Craig Jr., Joseph H. Baynard, Harvey H. Posner, L. Heidel Brown. *Not Pictured:* Douglas L. Manship Sr., Benjamin B. Taylor Jr., Scott Duchain Barton



Downtown Baton Rouge, estimated 1966



# 1970-1984

## 1978 FIRST DIRECTOR HIRED

Myron Falk was hired as the first part-time director. Falk and Chairperson Mary Frey Eaton created the Community Fund for the Arts in partnership with the Arts Council of Baton Rouge. The fund supports a thriving arts scene across the region, including Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra and Of Moving Colors dance company.





**1979**

## **BARNES TRUST FOUNDED**

The health care-focused Helen S. Barnes Trust enables Pennington Biomedical to hire its first full-time director with a six-year, \$100,000-per-year grant. George Bray's hiring provides huge momentum to grow Pennington into a research powerhouse of global renown. Barnes' giving is a testament to a woman who lived modestly but dreamed big for her community.



## **MID TO LATE 1980s**

### **DONOR ADVISED FUNDS GROW IN POPULARITY**

The first philanthropic tool of its kind in Louisiana, donor-advised funds permit individuals to support the organizations and projects they love close to home and around the world. A case in point about the flexibility of these charitable funds: One Foundation donor funded the construction of a volunteer-staffed medical clinic in the western African nation of Burkina Faso that provides care to this day.

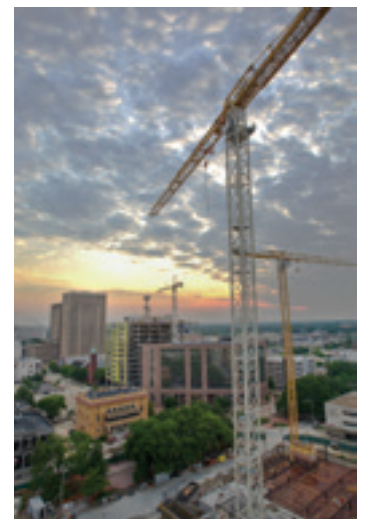
# 1985-1994

**1988**

**JOHN DAVIES HIRED**

The son of a diplomat who spent his formative years in Peru felt a natural connection to Baton Rouge, where he found a community eager to work to make life better for everyone.

From the start, Davies sought a higher profile for the Foundation—more members and more donations—out of conviction that it could do more. Over three-plus decades he would harness a willingness among disparate partners to come together on complex undertakings as different as restoration of University Lakes, criminal justice reform, and the development of Shaw Center for the Arts.





## 1992

### WILBUR MARVIN FOUNDATION ESTABLISHED

Wilbur Marvin loved building shopping centers in Puerto Rico and the Southern U.S. He also loved the cities where he did business, including Baton Rouge, where he created a legacy of community good when he left his assets to the Foundation through a new supporting organization, the Wilbur Marvin Foundation. Funds generated by those assets developed landmark projects of cultural and economic benefit like the \$55 million IBM complex on the riverfront, the \$70 million transformation of the Hilton Hotel and the Water Campus, which houses the world-renowned Water Institute.

## 1993

### FORUM 225

Civic-minded young men and women came together to lead, serve, and celebrate Baton Rouge. Forum 35's first large-scale project literally made the community brighter: Members raised \$350,000 to light the Mississippi River bridge that is the gateway to Baton Rouge.

Now Forum 225, initiatives vary from community clean-ups to the We Are BR! civic pride campaign, observance of the 1953 Baton Rouge bus boycott and co-hosting the groundbreaking Plan Baton Rouge effort to revitalize the city through new urbanism.

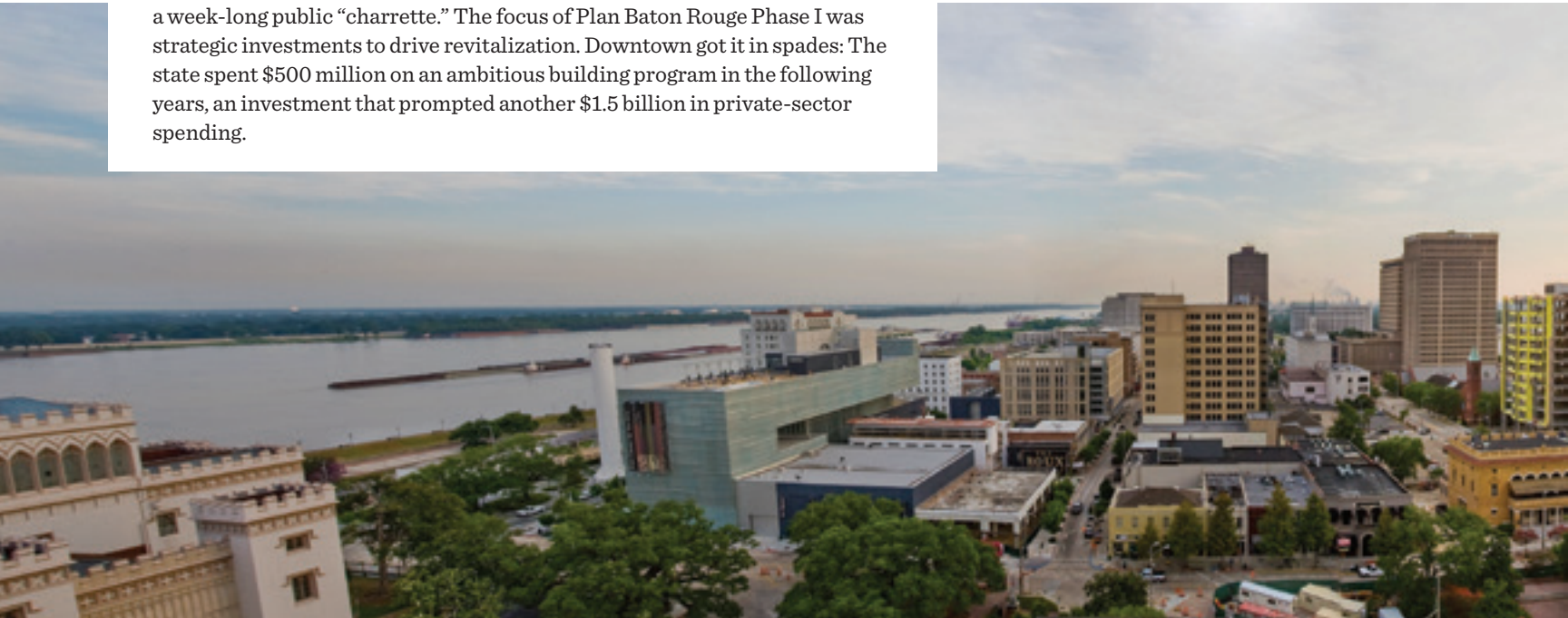


# 1995-2004

## 1997-98

### PLAN BATON ROUGE I

A world-renowned urban planner guided development of the first master plan for downtown and listened to what Baton Rouge said it wanted during a week-long public “charrette.” The focus of Plan Baton Rouge Phase I was strategic investments to drive revitalization. Downtown got it in spades: The state spent \$500 million on an ambitious building program in the following years, an investment that prompted another \$1.5 billion in private-sector spending.



## 2002 INAUGURAL BARTON AWARDS

The Barton Awards’ recognition of excellence and commitment in not-for-profit leadership and management celebrates winners for simply being the best in their field.

Named for Foundation founder John W. Barton, the Barton Awards include not just well-deserved accolades but also \$10,000 cash for winners to spend as they see fit.

## 2004

### CIVIC LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES DEPARTMENT FOUNDED

Developing long-term solutions to big issues like public education, health care reform, inner-city renewal and transportation was John Spain's focus as head of the new civic leadership initiatives department. The work included creating master plans for restoration of University Lakes and the Baton Rouge Health District and pushing for passenger-rail service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.



# 2005-2009

## 2005 HURRICANE KATRINA

The hurricane that changed Louisiana forever changed the Foundation, too.

After decades working mostly behind the scenes, it played a high-profile role in emergency relief and rebuilding when the world reached out to help after the storm.

There is no overstating the scope of its Katrina response. It created funds for storm evacuees and the rebuilding of storm-impacted areas, distributed \$45 million in aid, and coordinated offers of help from the use of private jets to the expert assistance of a French rescue team.



## 2005 EMPLOYEES 1ST

A new program launches, enabling companies to support employees facing financial emergencies after a disaster or personal hardship. Employees 1st cash grants have covered the cost of breast-cancer surgery and other medical treatment, funerals and emergency housing after disasters like house fires.





## 2007

### GAINES AWARD LAUNCHED

Louisiana's towering storyteller lives on in this celebration of a rising generation of African American fiction writers. Past winners of the nationally recognized Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence have landed on the *New York Times* best-seller list and Oprah Winfrey's global book club.



## 2008

### PLAN BATON ROUGE II

Livability, entertainment, retail, and more downtown housing were among the focal points of Plan Baton Rouge Phase II, the 10-year update to the original master plan.

The plan's second iteration envisioned Third Street as an entertainment corridor with restaurants and music. Strategic uses of the riverfront and greenways for walking and gathering were additional priorities to make downtown bustle.

# 2010-2014

## 2010 COMPANION ANIMAL ALLIANCE

Baton Rouge euthanized 80% of the dogs and cats in its shelter, most of them healthy animals, the year Companion Animal Alliance was founded by local animal-welfare advocates. Now it saves 81% of the animals it takes in. Initiatives to decrease the number of cats, dogs and other animals that enter the shelter include spay/neuter outreach and returning lost pets to owners.



## 2012 WATER CAMPUS

The 35-acre campus on the Mississippi River brings together world-class coastal scientists to tackle complex water-related challenges from South Louisiana to Vietnam.

Building sustainable communities as seas rise from climate change is a focus of the independent research institute. Its work ranges from modeling how sediment shifts in the waters surrounding Virginia's Chincoteague Island to deploying Dutch water-flow models to save Port Fourchon.





## 2013 NEW SCHOOLS FOR BATON ROUGE

New Schools for Baton Rouge brings nationally recognized charter-school operators to Baton Rouge to turn around failing public schools. Its goal is for no child in Baton Rouge to attend a D- or F-rated school by 2030.

The nonprofit has raised millions of dollars from national funders to recruit top charter networks to Baton Rouge, where it holds them accountable for measurable improvements in educational outcomes.



## 2014 LAKES MASTER PLAN

The Foundation celebrated half a century of serving Baton Rouge and announced the \$1 million master plan that laid out a vision of University Lakes as a beautiful and welcoming place where ecological restoration and expanded recreational opportunities go hand in hand.

Deepening the lakes by dredging them will improve water quality and prevent algae blooms. Dredged muck will be used for features like safer paths for walkers, runners and cyclists. A waterfront walkway will edge a new park at May Street and Dalrymple Drive, where shady spots will make this a place to linger and play.

# 2015-2019



## 2016 INAUGURAL KANTROW AWARD

Marcia Kaplan Kantrow worked alongside John G. Davies as the Foundation's first program director on initiatives to make life better in the community she loved.

The annual award honors the legacy of the Alexandria native who worked with quiet determination to make Baton Rouge better until her death at 53.

The award includes a \$5,000 grant to the recipient's not-for-profit of choice.



## 2016

### BATON ROUGE'S GREAT FLOOD

More than 140,000 homes were flooded by the cyclonic storm that dropped as much as 30 inches of rain in two days over some parts of South Louisiana. Some 16,000 donations from around the world helped raise more than \$5 million for the Foundation's Flood Relief Fund.

The Flood Proof Title Reclamation Project provided free legal help to flood victims whose homes were damaged by the storm but who lacked clear title or other key documents.





## 2016 EMPLOYEE'S 1ST GROWS

Employees 1st expanded sharply after the Great Flood of 2016, a 1,000-year storm that destroyed homes across South Louisiana when rain fell for days.

Nearly 80 companies and government agencies opened new employee-relief funds with Employees 1st to help scattered workers with emergency and longer-term needs. The funds received a combined \$6 million in contributions in the days and weeks after the storm.



## 2016 CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL

A Criminal Justice Coordinating Council initiative to streamline case processing safely reduced the parish incarceration rate by 47 percent over two years.

Developed by criminal justice experts and advocates, CJCC's pre-trial diversion program directed nonviolent detainees into mental health care and substance-abuse treatment instead of jail. Its work has moved East Baton Rouge closer to CJCC's goal: A justice system that is fairer and more equitable for all residents.

# 2020-2022



## 2020 COVID-19

The Fueling the Fight Fund collected more than \$300,000 to cook and deliver meals to area health care workers during the pandemic. The Three O’Clock project served 50,000-plus meals a day to hungry South Louisiana children, including in Baton Rouge in partnership with BREC. The Baton Rouge Health District collected personal protective equipment at an unused airport hangar, then distributed it to health care providers across the region.

## 2022

### THE END OF AN ERA

John G. Davies changed Baton Rouge. Davies grew the Foundation’s assets from \$5 million to \$722 million over 33 years, when it made \$550 million in grants to not-for-profits and for civic improvement. Davies was adept at deal-making and projects under his leadership included The Water Institute, Shaw Center for the Arts, IBM complex and Bridge Center for Hope. Davies also changed Saturday—and later other—mornings by way of BREADA Farmers’ Market, a beloved local tradition for many in food-loving Baton Rouge.





# 2022- PRESENT

## 2022

### CHRIS MEYER

Chris Meyer understands the power of education. The first member of his family to attend college, he graduated from Tulane and Harvard Kennedy School before traveling the globe with Defense Secretary Robert Gates as a White House Fellow.

He went on to found New Schools for Baton Rouge. Improving lives by creating opportunities for everyone has long shaped Meyer's work—a guiding principle well suited to his job as Foundation president and CEO.



## 2022

### STRATEGIC PLANNING

The strategic framework is a new “North Star” guiding the continuing work of building a thriving Baton Rouge for all.

Input from more than 300 community members shaped its priorities, which include catalyzing change, fostering a strong philanthropic community, and empowering changemakers.





## 2023 CENTER FOR NONPROFIT EXCELLENCE

Making not-for-profits stronger, more strategic and better equipped to serve their communities is the focus of the Foundation's new division.

The Center for Nonprofit Excellence offers continuing education and other support to bolster technical skills and expand capacity while providing a dedicated entry point for not-for-profits to connect with Foundation staff. Effective engagement with the broader community is another key function.



## 2023 OPPORTUNITY DATA PROJECT

Data can tell us plenty, including where to invest for the best return.

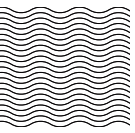
The data-driven Opportunity Data Project aims to improve the quality of life in Baton Rouge by identifying specific areas most in need of philanthropic support and other resources.

The partnership with Common Good Labs will take into account educational attainment, income levels, health care access, and other factors to determine where targeted investments can do the most good.

## 2024 60 YEARS OF IMPACT

The Foundation celebrates 60 years of impact, launching a new brand to communicate the ripple effect partnering with BRAF can create in the community, emphasizing the importance of working together and focusing on work today that makes for a better tomorrow.

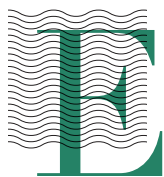




# Lessons *for* progress

## Meet the change agents reshaping education in South Louisiana

BY CHLOE MARTIN & CHELSEA BORRUANO  
PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER



Education is often called the great equalizer, providing a pathway to success for those who are willing to work hard and dedicate themselves to learning. The unfortunate reality is, not everyone has equal access to educational opportunities.

The circumstances children are born into predict the opportunities they will have, and education remains one of the most significant in determining outcomes.

Children are expected to be ready — cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically — to succeed when they get to school. Additionally, year-round access to quality learning and a dedicated support system are needed to sustain academic and personal development. For millions of students, these conditions are not being met.

This is particularly evident in South Louisiana.

Nearly 20% of South Louisiana residents live in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty: the biggest indicator of low academic performance in schools.

The 2020 Louisiana Educational Assessment Program test revealed only 32% of third-grade students in South

Louisiana were proficient in reading, and the shortfall is particularly acute in schools with the highest concentrations of students from underrepresented groups and students living in poverty.

Failure to read proficiently is linked to higher rates of school dropout, which suppresses not only individual earning potential but also the region’s competitiveness and overall productivity.

The data presents an important question: How can we come together, working against systemic barriers, to bring long-term solutions for our youth’s education and futures?

Teachers across South Louisiana are fighting to change those disheartening statistics and make a positive impact. Honored as Louisiana’s 2024 Teacher of the Year, Kylie Altier believes that with community, anything is possible.

Altier is a first-grade teacher at McKinley Elementary School, a merger of Buchanan and Terrace Elementary, in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. Living out her dream of being a teacher and inspired to serve as a change agent for all students, Altier joined the Teach For America corps program at 20 years old where she was placed in a first-grade classroom in Huntsville, Alabama. Her early experiences working with

students in Title I schools underscored a pronounced disparity in the quality of education across socioeconomic divides.

After graduating from the Alabama corps in 2013, life led her here to Baton Rouge. Although she completed her corps experience out-of-state, Altier said she is surrounded by a network of individuals in South Louisiana who are committed to providing students with as many opportunities for growth as possible. “It’s just really inspiring when you’re in the Teach For America alumni network to see what other people are doing,” she said.

For more than 30 years, TFA Greater Baton Rouge has continued to break through barriers and expand opportunities for students in low-income communities in the region. Today, more than 300 TFA leaders are working alongside urban and rural communities, proving every year that all South Louisiana students can achieve at the highest levels.

With support from generous donors, educators, and community members, TFA South Louisiana has impacted more than 15,000 students across four parishes, partnering with 12 of the region’s most under-resourced schools.



“We’ve seen significant progress toward our mission, and there’s much to accomplish still so that every child can live a life of their choosing.”

—Laura Vinsant, executive director at TFA Greater Baton Rouge



TFA Greater Baton Rouge is directing its efforts to increase economic mobility for children and families across the region. Considering the pandemic’s disruption of the education system, they have committed to pursuing the goal of doubling third-grade reading proficiency to 82% by 2030.

TFA is a locally rooted and nationally connected nonprofit organization that recruits diverse leaders to become “corps members.” Corps members commit to teaching in a low-income community for two years, where they are employed by local schools and confront both the challenges and joys of expanding opportunity for underserved youth.

After two years, they become part of the TFA alumni network. Informed and inspired by their students, many continue teaching, much like Altier.

This network allows like-minded educators to share ideas and collaborate on working toward equal opportunity

and resources for all students. To initiate change, however, they must consider the barriers that exist between a child and education and how to navigate them.

The Baton Rouge community provides unmatched support for teachers like Altier who strive to impact early childhood education. While there is still work to be done to eliminate inequalities everywhere, it is evident that Baton Rouge residents are actively engaged in improving the educational landscape here.

“It was in the moment I thought I needed to take a step back that allowed my kids and my community to take this huge step forward,” said Altier. She reflects on how letting go of the pursuit of perfection in favor of vulnerability has led to more authentic teaching experiences and a ripple effect of positive change throughout the school system.

By harnessing the power of community partnerships and grants, Altier has developed innovative programming that prioritizes an inclusive and personalized approach to learning.

Shortly after coming to teach in Baton Rouge, Altier received a grant from the Academic Distinction Fund at the Foundation, which supports teachers in their work and encourages both schools and the community to foster improved learning. This allowed her to purchase VR headsets for her classroom, which have made a dramatic difference for her students.

Another notable endeavor she highlighted is the development of a school garden, which has blossomed from a simple project into a beacon for community collaboration and



educational exploration. With support from Volunteers in Public Schools and Urban Agricultural Specialist Dr. Marlin Ford from Southern University, she started her school garden. Now, with the leadership of University United Methodist and master gardener Shirley Flake, both the garden and the children are reaching new heights.

In addition, a recent grant from BRAF and Neighbors Federal Credit Union, along with parental support, will allow Altier to create a new outdoor classroom for her students. Outdoor learning environments have shown positive results for children, particularly those who are neurodivergent, and provide an inclusive space for all students to learn and explore.

While in-school education is vital, Altier also stressed that a solid foundation starts at home. She asserts that literacy is a civil right crucial for



survival in society. Through a second grant from the Academic Distinction Fund, Altier is set to launch an early literacy program for parents and caregivers to facilitate one-on-one reading lessons for their children in a safe, secure and fun environment. “As someone who suffered from dyslexia as a child and was a late reader, I know how invaluable early literacy can be,” shared Altier.

These projects underscore the profound impact community can have in improving Baton Rouge’s education system. Altier’s narrative paints a vivid picture of a city where education is a collective endeavor, encompassing everything from mental health initiatives by ICARE to the Baton Rouge

## Teach For America's Approach:



### Talent Recruitment and Matching

TFA recruits, selects, and matches tutors, teachers, and principals to schools, and system leader candidates to districts, CMOs, and state agencies.



### Leadership Development

TFA’s program and strategic partnerships grow leadership, accelerate career paths, and increase the impact of TFA members and their teams, from schools to statehouses.



### Network Support

TFA connects, convenes, and catalyzes a network of leaders working to disrupt, change, and reinvent systems to work for students and communities.

Source: <https://www.teachforamerica.org/what-we-do/our-work>





STEM program, and where everyone plays a role in nurturing the growth of young minds.

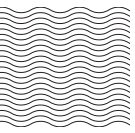
A robust education system also contributes directly to the overall improvement of the city. Prioritizing literacy and early childhood education establishes a solid foundation, setting the stage for more meaningful experiences in high school and beyond. This strategic approach envisions a brighter future for individuals and the city they call home.

She notes that continued support from organizations like TFA South Louisiana and BRAF has shown her that the East Baton Rouge community

is truly dedicated to this mission. “It’s really special to be in East Baton Rouge and see this community rallying behind our children.”

Education is not just about imparting knowledge but about creating environments where students can grow, thrive, and feel seen. Altier’s journey invites everyone to consider how they, too, can contribute to a learning ecosystem that breaks down barriers, embraces vulnerability, and recognizes the potential in every student. ■





# E V E N T S

## FOUNDERS FORUM 2023 FEBRUARY 2023



## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK LAUNCH JANUARY 2023





# CENTER FOR NONPROFIT EXCELLENCE LAUNCH

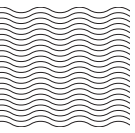
MAY 2023



# ANNUAL MEETING 2023

MARCH 2023





## Fostering hope: Community lends a helping paw to shelter animals in need

IN DECEMBER 2023, Companion Animal Alliance was faced with a scheduled power outage that would leave their animals disconnected from the level of care generally provided by the shelter. Acting promptly, CAA appealed to the community for foster homes for the duration of the outage.

Thanks to the swift action taken by CAA and the community's generosity, 210 animals were placed in foster homes locally, ensuring their comfort and safety during the outage. Generators were also generously donated to provide power for the remaining animals in the shelter.

Twenty-one of these foster animals were adopted, finding their forever homes. In the face of adversity, Companion Animal Alliance and the community demonstrated the limitless power of compassion. This collective effort serves as a powerful reminder of the positive outcomes achievable when a community unites for a common cause, ensuring the well-being of every resident, whether they have four legs or otherwise.



TIM MUELLER

# Your finances and philanthropy, SIMPLIFIED.

Under the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's new program, you can open a charitable account with us **while keeping your own financial advisor**. Your advisor manages all your funds, and you can make grants to nonprofits through the Foundation.

Find out how the Foundation has simplified giving to the causes you care about. Please contact Carissa Graves at (225) 387-6126 or [cgraves@braf.org](mailto:cgraves@braf.org) for more information.



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