

# CURRENTS

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## VISION IN ACTION

*How Clay Young's dream transformed into the Inspiration Center*



SITE PREPARATION for the Inspiration Center at Howell Park. Read about how the idea came together on page 26.

# CONTENTS

FIRST QUARTER 2026 | VOLUME NINETEEN | NUMBER ONE

02

LETTER

Thomas J. Adamek, Chair

04

ABOUT US

05

LEAD IN

- » New Office
- » BRAF Fellows
- » Gathering for Good: Building Foundations
- » BRAF1964.org
- » Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence
- » Plan Baton Rouge III

14

RESEARCH

Opportunity Data Project:  
Healthy Families

20

AT THE FOUNDATION

**The Giving Collective**  
A Collaborative Approach to  
Charitable Foundations

26

CIVIC PROJECTS

**Cover Story:**

**Inspiring Community**

The Novel Idea Transforming Howell Park  
One Hoop, Note, and Partnership at  
a Time

34

DONOR STORY

Matt Kubicek

36

NONPROFITS

**Making Waves in Mid City**

The YMCA's Modern Transformation

42

STAFF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

43

EVENT ROUNDUP

44

CODA

A Fresh Space for Fresh Food



**A**s we reflect on 2025, I am encouraged by the progress taking shape across our region and grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside the staff, partners, donors, and community members who make this work possible. Together, we continue to build on six decades of service that guide the Foundation and shape the path forward.

Throughout this issue of *Currents*, you'll read about some of the exciting happenings at the Foundation since our last publication, as well as inspiring stories about nonprofits and donors paving the way for a better community.

The opening of our new office at the Rivermark Centre was a meaningful moment for the Foundation and the community. The space was designed to support collaboration, foster conversation, and provide more room for our growing team.

We continued to invest in the strength of our nonprofit ecosystem. Through the Center for Nonprofit Excellence, nearly 50 new Fellows completed their programs and joined a network of leaders who are guiding organizations across the Capital Area with clarity and confidence.

Our commitment to understanding community needs remained central throughout the year. The latest

Opportunity Data Project briefing examined life expectancy as a key indicator of well-being and offered insights that are helping local leaders identify where philanthropic support can make the greatest difference for families across East Baton Rouge Parish.

We also grew the Giving Collective, a model rooted in the strength of collaboration. The Foundation's experience working with supporting organizations during times of disaster showed how shared systems and coordinated staffing can expand impact. By combining shared staff resources and centralized administrative support, the Giving Collective gives organizations a framework that helps them focus on mission driven work while benefiting from the strength of a larger team.

Among them, we will share how the Capital Area YMCA used its Organization Fund at the Foundation to support the development of a new branch on North Foster Drive, which will expand access to health, wellness, and youth programming in Mid City. The Inspiration Center also moved forward with help from the Foundation, which kept construction on track and supported a project designed to create opportunities for families in North Baton Rouge.

Community voices played an important role in shaping long-term priorities. Thousands of residents participated in Plan Baton Rouge III through open houses, surveys, and conversations that helped create a vision for a more connected and vibrant downtown. With public input complete, the planning team is now preparing a plan that will guide civic investments in the years ahead.

Throughout the year, the Foundation brought community leaders and fund advisors together through the Gathering for Good series. This year's conversations focused on early childhood education and gave attendees a deeper understanding of both the challenges and the promising work

underway across our region.

We also celebrated author Essie Chambers at the eighteenth annual Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence public ceremony. The event honored her debut novel, *Swift River*, and highlighted the power of storytelling to deepen understanding, strengthen connection across communities, and carry forward the enduring legacy of Ernest J. Gaines.

As we look to the year ahead, I am inspired by the momentum created through these collective efforts and optimistic about the opportunities before us. The progress we see today is the result of many people working together with a shared focus on strengthening the Capital Region. It is also a reminder of the responsibility we carry as a Foundation to listen closely, act with intention, and serve as a steady leader for our community.

The work ahead will call for collaboration, creativity, and a continued willingness to meet challenges with solutions that move our region forward. I am confident that the Foundation is prepared to lead alongside our partners and to continue serving as a changemaker for the issues that matter most to families in Baton Rouge. Our region is stronger when we work together, and the Foundation will remain a guiding force for progress by fostering relationships, elevating local voices, and supporting ideas that create lasting impact.

Thank you for your trust and partnership. I look forward to the progress we will build together in 2026.

With sincere thanks,

**Thomas J. Adamek**  
Chair, Baton Rouge Area Foundation



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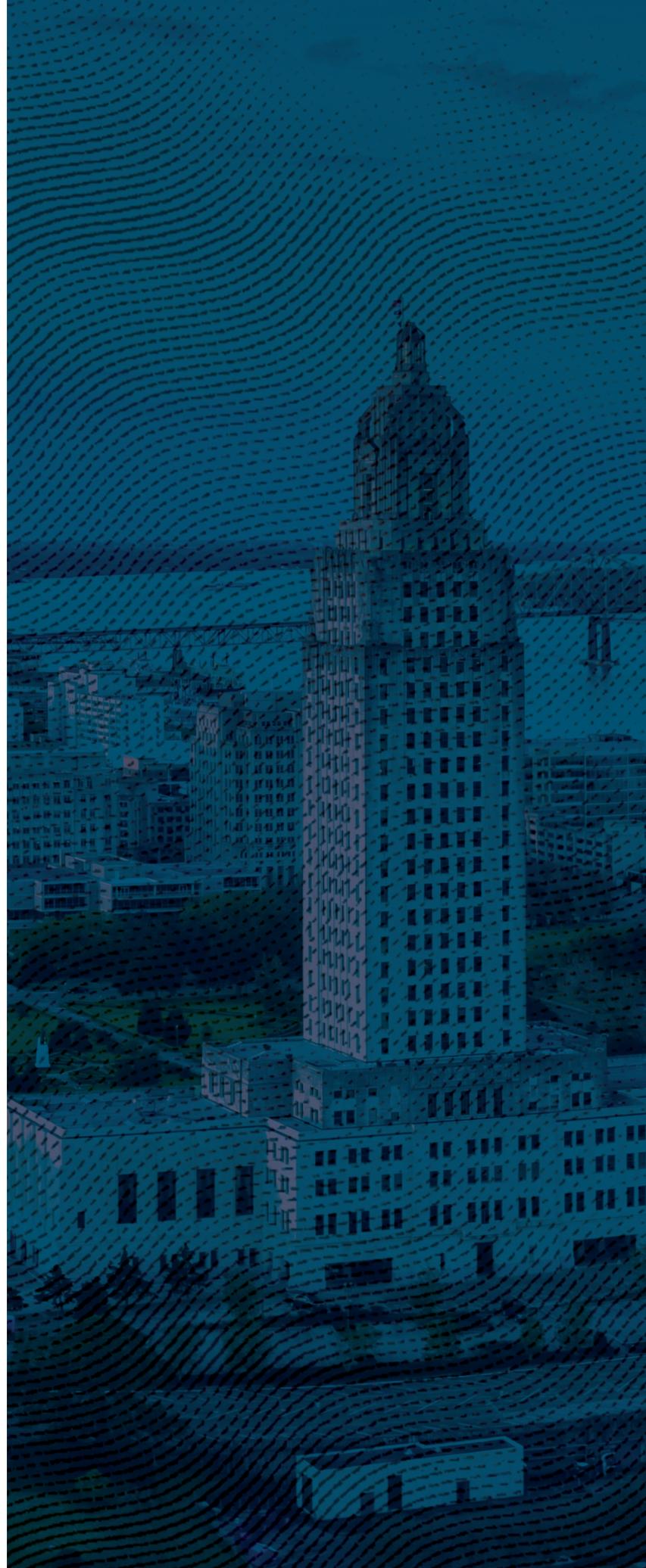
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## About

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 positive change and opportunities 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.



## New Office

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation marked an exciting milestone with the opening of its new office at the Rivermark Centre in downtown Baton Rouge. More than 200 members, partners, and friends joined the Foundation in early October for an open house that invited guests to explore the space and celebrate the beginning of a new chapter for the organization and the communities it serves.

Throughout the evening, guests toured meeting rooms, collaborative areas, and expansive convening spaces designed to bring people together. Staff highlighted how the larger boardroom, flexible conference rooms, and informal gathering areas will support everything from focused work sessions to member events and more.

The move from the IBM Building unfolded over several months and included a multi-phase transition period. During this time, teams navigated a blend of hybrid work, regular check ins, and intentional in person touchpoints to remain connected. To keep members and donors engaged, team leaders hosted virtual discussions that offered updates on ongoing projects.

Located just a few blocks from the previous office, the Rivermark Centre provides approximately fifty percent more square footage. The expanded footprint supports a growing staff and offers greater flexibility for collaboration among members, nonprofits, and community partners. The move also brings new efficiencies, with lower rental costs allowing more

resources to be directed to mission-focused work across the region.

As the Foundation settles into its new home, the Rivermark Centre will serve as a welcoming hub for convening ideas, building partnerships, and advancing opportunities for people across Baton Rouge and the surrounding communities.



**FIND US AT OUR NEW LOCATION:**  
**451 FLORIDA STREET**  
**SUITE LL 100**  
**BATON ROUGE, LA 70801**

# Nonprofit Board Fellows and Development Fellows Graduation

Strong nonprofit leadership shapes the health and resilience of our region, and in 2025 the Baton Rouge Area Foundation continued its commitment to supporting the people who make that possible. Through the Center for Nonprofit Excellence, two tuition free leadership cohorts took part in months of learning, connection, and growth that is already strengthening organizations across Greater Baton Rouge.

In July, the Foundation celebrated the graduation of its newest Development Fellows cohort. Created for emerging development professionals, the program equips participants with essential skills in fundraising strategy, storytelling, marketing, and impact measurement. Over six months, fellows engaged in interactive workshops, peer discussions, and hands-on exercises that deepened their understanding of how strong development practices fuel mission driven work.

A new mentoring component paired each fellow with an experienced nonprofit leader. This one-on-one support offered practical guidance and space to think through real challenges and opportunities, helping fellows build confidence and clarity as they grow in their roles.

The Foundation celebrated the graduation of the newest Nonprofit Board Fellows cohort in November. Designed for professionals with fewer than five years of board service, the program prepares emerging leaders to serve with purpose and accountability on nonprofit boards throughout the region. Over seven sessions, Fellows explored



governance, fiduciary responsibility, ethical leadership, and fundraising fundamentals while identifying authentic ways to contribute their expertise in service to local missions.

Connection remained central throughout the program. Fellows learned from one another and from seasoned board and staff leaders, gaining a fuller understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities that come with effective board service.

Together, these programs reflect the Foundation's belief that strong nonprofits begin with strong leaders. As graduates step into new and

expanded leadership roles, the Foundation celebrates their dedication and looks forward to the impact they will bring to organizations and communities across Greater Baton Rouge.



LEARN MORE ABOUT PROGRAMS OFFERED BY THE CENTER FOR NONPROFIT EXCELLENCE AT [BRAF.ORG/NONPROFITS](https://braf.org/nonprofits)



Development Fellows cohort



Nonprofit Board Fellows cohort

## Gathering for Good: Building Foundations

In September, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation hosted *Gathering for Good: Building Foundations* at Knock Knock Children’s Museum, bringing together fund advisors for a thoughtful conversation about the future of early childhood education in Baton Rouge. The gathering highlighted why early learning is essential to long term community well-being and showed how local partners are working together to expand opportunities for young children and their families.

The discussion, moderated by Chris Meyer, Foundation president and CEO, featured community leaders Dianna Payton of the YWCA Greater Baton Rouge, Kelly LeDuff from the Office of the Mayor-President, and Shenoa Thompson of the East Baton Rouge Parish School System.

Panelists shared insights on coordinated strategies to improve early childhood outcomes and described ongoing work to establish a new Early Education Coordinating Entity. This effort aims to strengthen access, improve program quality, and support lasting results for children parish wide.

Building on the conversation, the Foundation invited philanthropic support to help unlock matching dollars through the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund. In partnership with the school system, this initiative seeks to expand tuition assistance so more families can enroll their children in high quality early learning programs.

Gathering for Good offered fundholders a clear look at the

collaborative work shaping brighter futures for Baton Rouge’s youngest residents and demonstrated how philanthropy can accelerate progress for families across the region.



**SUPPORT BRAF'S EDUCATION-FOCUSED WORK BY MAKING A DONATION TO THE EDUCATION IMPACT FUND**



Gathering for Good panelists pictured left to right: Chris Meyer, Dianna Payton, Kelly LeDuff, Shenoa Thompson



## BRAF1964.org Celebrating 60 Years of Impact

In celebration of six decades of service, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation launched 60 for 60, a storytelling project that highlights the people, partnerships, and progress that have shaped the region since 1964. Hosted at BRAF1964.org, the series brings together voices from across the community to reflect on the Foundation’s history and its ongoing work to strengthen Greater Baton Rouge.

The stories feature nonprofit leaders, donors, and changemakers who have helped advance the Foundation’s mission over the years. Their reflections honor the vision of the Foundation’s 12 founding members, whose commitment to building a better Baton Rouge continues to guide the organization’s work today. Through their experiences,

viewers see how local leadership and philanthropy have come together to meet community needs and open new possibilities for the future.

From expanding access to mental health care and supporting disaster recovery to investing in education, economic opportunity, and overall quality of life, the stories highlighted in 60 for 60 demonstrate the power of partnership and shared purpose. Each story shows how meaningful change takes shape through long term commitment and many hands working together.

The Foundation invites members, partners, and residents to explore the full series and celebrate the voices that continue to move the region forward at BRAF1964.org.



EXPLORE THE FULL  
VIDEO SERIES



## Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence

In October, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation hosted the eighteenth annual Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence at the Manship Theatre, bringing together readers, writers, and community partners to celebrate the power of storytelling. This year's recipient, Essie Chambers, was honored for her debut novel *Swift River*, a work widely recognized as one of the most notable books of the year.

Created to honor the legacy of Louisiana author Ernest J. Gaines, the award recognizes rising African American fiction writers. Supported by donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the prize includes fifteen thousand dollars to help the selected author continue developing their

craft and sharing their work with a wider audience.

Set in 1987 Massachusetts, *Swift River* follows Diamond Newberry, the only Black teenager in her rural town, as she uncovers family history that reshapes her understanding of identity and belonging. The novel has received acclaim for its lyrical language and was selected as a Read with Jenna Book Club pick.

During the program, Chambers reflected on her connection to Gaines, shared the inspiration behind *Swift River*, and read an excerpt from the novel to an engaged audience of Foundation members, partners, and supporters of the arts. The evening served as a reminder of how literature

can illuminate experience, deepen empathy, and connect communities across distance and time.

The Foundation extends its gratitude to Chambers, the award judges, and the donors and guests whose support keeps this tradition strong and ensures that Ernest J. Gaines' legacy continues to inspire new voices in American fiction.



LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE AWARD AND THIS  
YEAR'S WINNER AT  
[ERNESTJGAINESAWARD.ORG](https://www.ernestjgainesaward.org)



Winner, Essie Chambers (left) in discussion with Opal Moore (right) one of the award's judges.



Ms. Chambers (center-left) pictured with members of the Gaines family.





## Plan Baton Rouge III

More than two decades ago, the first two phases of Plan Baton Rouge helped spark a new era of revitalization downtown, laying the groundwork for the public and private investments that reshaped the heart of the city. Those early plans guided the creation of new housing, cultural destinations, and welcoming public spaces that residents and visitors continue to enjoy today.

Plan Baton Rouge III builds on that momentum with a clear focus on the future. Led by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, this next chapter aims to bring more people, activity, and opportunity into the city center while strengthening its role as a vibrant hub for the entire region.

Over the past year, internationally recognized planning firm Sasaki has partnered with local leaders and

community organizations to hear directly from residents. Through three open houses and online surveys, the planning team gathered insights from more than 600 in-person participants and more than 3,000 survey respondents. This feedback is shaping a plan rooted in community priorities and designed to support long term growth.

The final public meeting, held at the Shaw Center for the Arts, marked an important milestone in the process. The event capped a year of meaningful engagement and offered attendees a first look at draft concepts for key sites and corridors throughout downtown. Community members shared reactions, refined priorities, and offered perspectives on which investments will matter most in the decade ahead.

Through this engagement, three guiding themes have emerged. The first

centers on strengthening downtown's connection to the Mississippi River through mixed use development, active ground floor spaces, and welcoming public areas that draw people toward the waterfront. The second focuses on aligning major planning efforts so that transportation, housing, arts, and economic development strategies reinforce one another in practical and lasting ways. The third highlights the importance of growing downtown's residential base by expanding housing options and everyday amenities that make it easier for people to live, work, and spend more time in the city center.

With community input now complete, the project is moving toward the final stages. Sasaki and civic partners are refining a preferred plan, shaping key site designs, and preparing an implementation strategy that reflects the vision shared throughout the

engagement process. Next, the team will develop an Early Action Roadmap that identifies near term projects, partners, and potential funding sources so the region can begin moving from vision to visible progress.

When finished, Plan Baton Rouge III will offer a roadmap for future investment, outlining catalyst projects and long-range strategies to guide downtown’s evolution. Through continued collaboration among public, private, and community partners, the goal is a more connected, welcoming, and active downtown that anchors the region’s economic and cultural life for generations to come.



LEARN MORE AND FOLLOW THE PLANNING PROCESS AT [PLANBATONROUGE.COM](http://PLANBATONROUGE.COM)





## About the Opportunity Data Project

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation believes that data and analytics can be a powerful tool for hope and progress, especially when it reveals both where our community stands and where we have the potential to go.

Their most recent Opportunity Data Project briefing focused on one of the most telling indicators of community well-being: life expectancy. How long we live reflects more than just access to health care. It reveals patterns of opportunity and inequity, shaped by the places we live, the resources we

can reach, and the conditions we face every day.

While preparing for this briefing, the Foundation met with health leaders across the parish: hospital leaders, Health District officials, medical researchers, and community advocates for improved health outcomes. Through those conversations, it became clear that our community has the tools, partnerships, and knowledge to meet this challenge. Across Baton Rouge, local leaders are working to expand behavioral health supports, redesign dangerous streets, and build better systems of care. This report builds on those efforts, offering both analysis and a clear, actionable path forward.

By working together across sectors

we can help ensure that more children in Baton Rouge grow up to live long, healthy lives. Let this report be a call to action: not one of despair, but of determination.

A condensed version of this report is provided in the following pages. To read the full report and view the accompanying data maps visit [OPPORTUNITYBTR.ORG/HEALTHY-FAMILIES](https://OPPORTUNITYBTR.ORG/HEALTHY-FAMILIES).





# Opportunity Data Project: Healthy Families

## A ROADMAP TO INCREASE LIFE EXPECTANCY IN BATON ROUGE, AN ABBREVIATED BRIEFING

One of the best ways to examine opportunity in the context of community health is to measure how long people live. Does each successive generation live longer than their parents? Do local people usually live to be at least as old as the average for the rest of the country?

Analyzing trends in local life expectancy can help provide answers to questions like these. Life expectancy is defined as the number of years a newborn baby is expected to live. It goes up when more residents live to older ages; and it goes down when diseases or other causes lead more people to die at earlier ages.

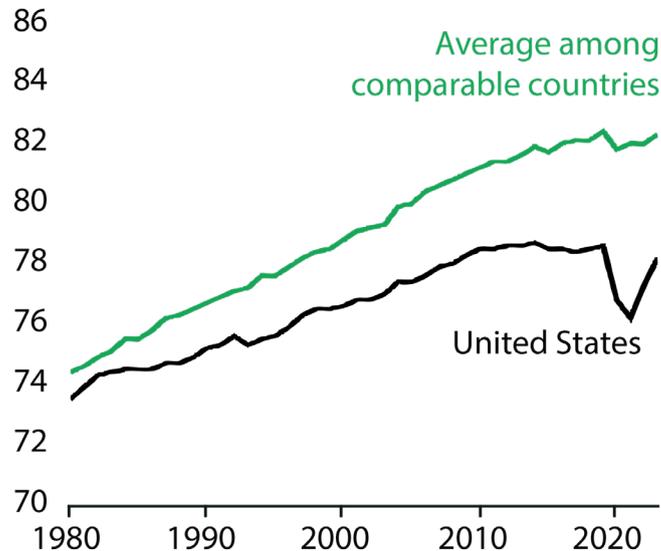
Unfortunately, life expectancy in the United States is around four years below the average found in other countries with similar levels of wealth and education. Today, the average American is expected to live until around 78 years old, while people in similar countries, like France, Germany, and Canada, have been living until around 82 years old for almost a decade.

### LIFE EXPECTANCY IN EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH IS LOWER THAN THE AVERAGE FOR THE UNITED STATES.

People who live in East Baton Rouge Parish have a life expectancy of around 73 to 74 years, which is approximately four years lower than the country as a whole. This is similar to many other locations across the state. However, a number of other parishes across Louisiana perform much better,

### Life expectancy at birth from 1980 to 2023

Estimates for the average child born each year

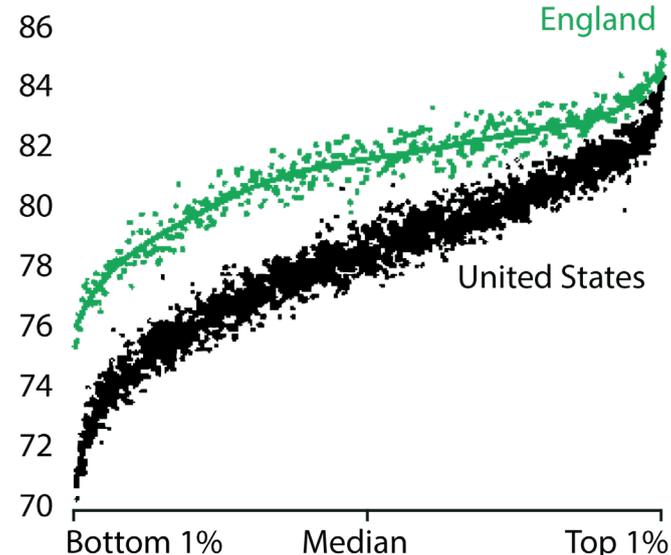


Note: Comparable countries include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K.

Source: The Kaiser Family Foundation.

### Life expectancy at different levels of income

Estimates for children born between 2010 to 2015



Source: The Financial Times.

including Bossier, Jefferson, and Lafayette. Life expectancy in East Baton Rouge is much lower than in the nation as a whole because the parish has a larger proportion of premature deaths. Premature deaths are defined as deaths that occur before a person reaches their average expected lifespan.

**FIVE COMMON CAUSES OF PREMATURE DEATH ARE FAR MORE PREVALENT IN EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH THAN IN THE REST OF THE NATION.**

There are five common causes of premature death that are much more prevalent in East Baton Rouge Parish than in the rest of the country.

- **Cardiovascular** disease is the #1 cause of early deaths in the parish and local rates are 60% worse than in the entire United States.
- **Accidents** are the #2 cause of premature deaths in East Baton Rouge and local rates are 80% worse than in the nation as a whole.
- **Homicide** is the #4 cause of early deaths in the parish and local rates are 300% worse than in the entire country.
- **Infant deaths** are the #5 cause of premature deaths in the parish and local rates are 70% worse than in the entire United States.
- **Kidney disease** is the #6 cause of early deaths in the parish and local

rates are around 180% worse than in the entire country.

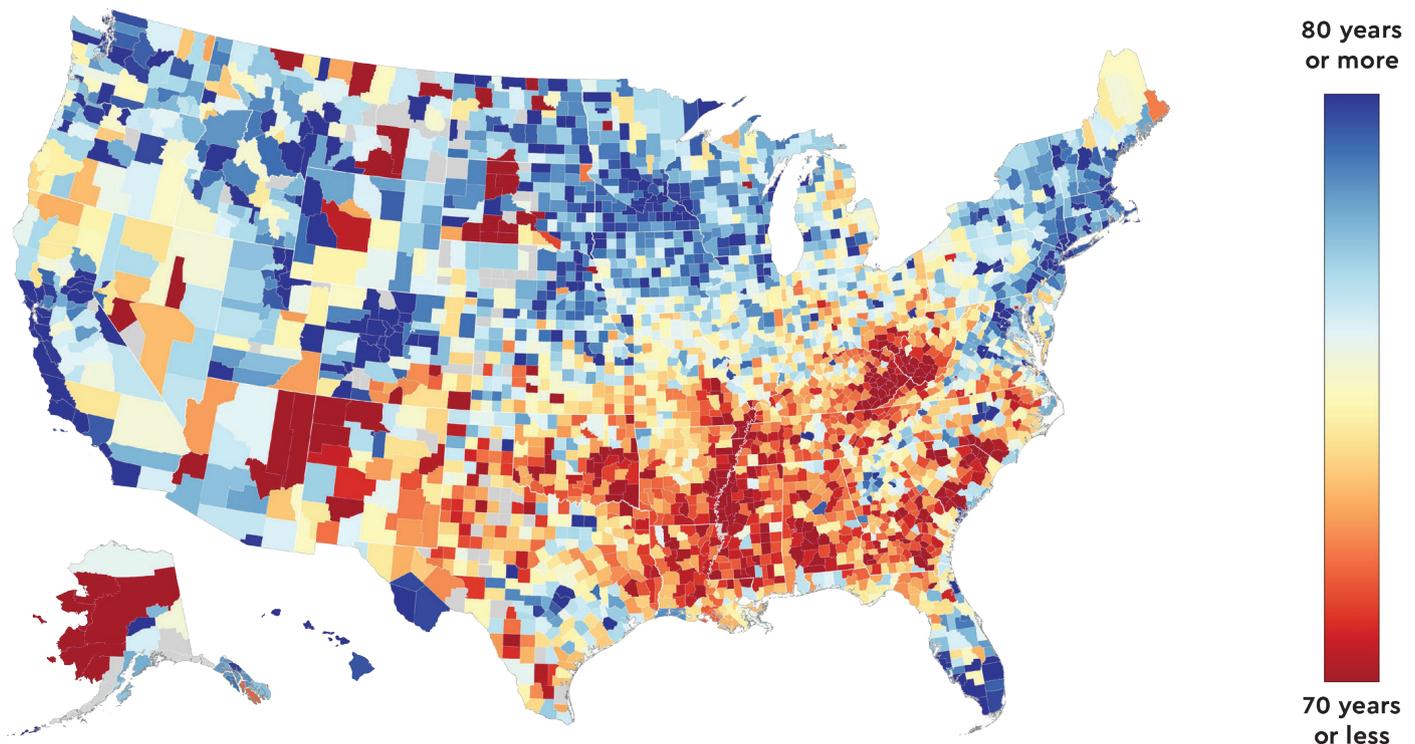
Local efforts to increase life expectancy should begin by focusing on these areas. These five causes are responsible for over half of the premature deaths in the parish and data from the rest of the nation shows that it is very possible for our community to improve in each one. If East Baton Rouge improves to reach the U.S. average in these five areas, the premature death rate would decline by around 25% in our community.

**CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE**

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in America. In East

**Average life expectancy by county in the United States**

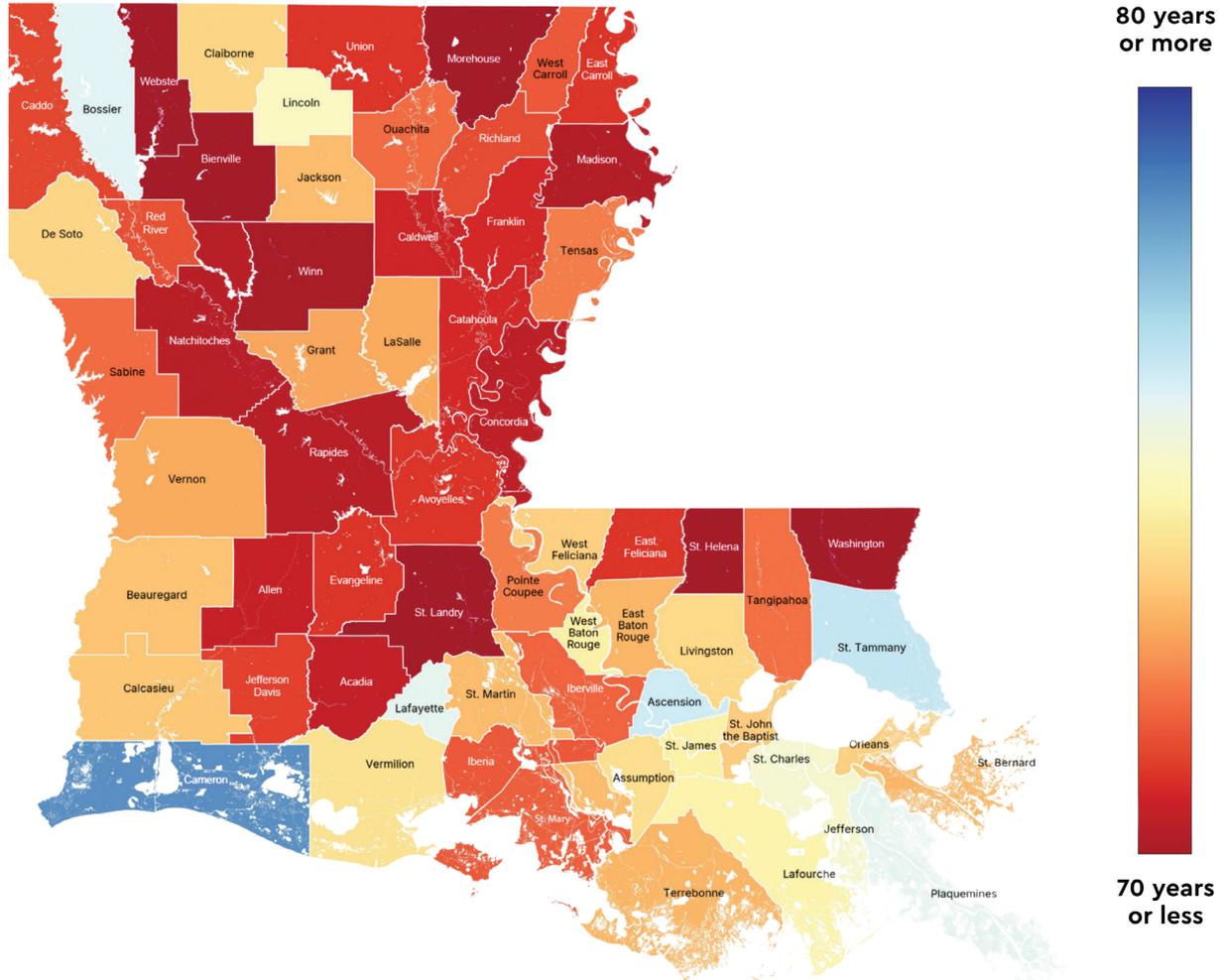
Based on data from 2020 to 2022



Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

## Average life expectancy by parish in Louisiana

Based on data from 2020 to 2022



Source: University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Baton Rouge, more than 600 people die early deaths each year due to this condition.

Cardiovascular disease usually develops slowly as fat and cholesterol in the bloodstream form a sticky substance called plaque. Over the course of decades, plaque clogs the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle, which eventually leads to death from heart attacks, strokes, heart

failure, and related conditions.

The most effective strategies to prevent cardiovascular disease are focused on the development of a long-term healthy lifestyle. This includes helping people to reduce smoking and tobacco use, adopt a healthy diet, engage in physical activity, and manage stress.

### ACCIDENTS

Deaths due to accidents are quite common in the United States, especially among children and younger adults. These causes include falls, drownings, unintentional firearm discharges, and suffocation. However, the majority of premature deaths due to accidents come from two categories: drug overdoses and motor vehicle accidents.



## RESEARCH

Loss of life due to accidents like these is 80% worse in East Baton Rouge than in the rest of the United States. Overdoses make up the largest share of these local deaths. They are nearly two times more common in the parish than in the rest of the country. Deaths due to the use of drugs like heroin and fentanyl more than tripled in Louisiana between 2018 and 2021. Notably, opioid deaths have declined in recent years in East Baton Rouge.

Research suggests that increasing access to health care, addiction treatment, and outreach programs for those dealing with substance abuse can reduce overdose deaths.

Motor vehicle accidents make up the second greatest share of accidental deaths in our community and are around two times more common in the parish than in the nation as a whole.

Fatalities due to vehicle accidents are concentrated along specific roads and highways. More than half of all pedestrian deaths in the parish occur on just five roads: Airline Highway, Florida Boulevard, Nicholson Drive, Plank Road, and Siegen Lane. Cyclist deaths are also more prevalent along Airline Highway, as well as in the area around LSU. Motor vehicle driver and passenger deaths occur most frequently on Interstate 12, Airline

### Leading causes of premature death in East Baton Rouge Parish

Estimated “years of potential life lost,” 2019 to 2023 average

	Premature deaths each year	Typical age at premature death	Years of potential life lost each year	Premature death rate vs. the entire U.S.
#1. Cardiovascular disease	640	55–60	14,000	60% Worse
#2. Accidents	360	40–45	13,000	80% Worse
#3. Cancer	435	60–65	9,000	Equal
#4. Homicide	115	30–35	5,000	300% Worse
#5. Infant deaths	45	0	3,500	70% Worse
#6. Kidney disease	80	55–60	1,800	180% Worse
#7. Suicide	45	40–45	1,700	25% Better
#8. Respiratory disease	50	60–65	1,000	66% Better
#9. (tie) Liver disease	40	55–60	900	66% Better
#9. (tie) Sepsis	40	55–60	900	40% Worse

Note: The years of potential life lost are determined for each person who passed away prematurely. These calculations vary based on the average additional life expectancy of someone in the United States of the same age and sex, e.g., according to the Social Security Administration, an American woman who is 60 years old is expected to live 24 more years, while a man who is the same age is expected to live 20 more years. Cardiovascular disease is combination heart disease and strokes. This table also excludes COVID-19 since local deaths due to this virus declined to less than 40 in 2023 and 2024. Figures are rounded to ease comparisons.

Source: Common Good Labs analysis of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Social Security Administration.



Highway, Plank Road, and Scenic Highway. They are also common along rural roadways with higher rates of speed in the northern part of the parish.

Evidence shows that traffic calming infrastructure and street design prioritizing the safety of pedestrians and cyclists can bring down the number of traffic fatalities in a community.

## HOMICIDE

Homicide is an American public-health crisis. The murder rate in the United States is more than double the size of that found in similar countries like Canada, France, and Germany. In East Baton Rouge Parish, the problem is even worse. The local homicide rate has remained four to five times greater than the rest of the country since 2016. In 2024, the city of Baton Rouge had a murder rate higher than New Orleans, Chicago, Baltimore, and nearly every other medium- or large-sized U.S. city.

Analysis in previous Opportunity Data Project briefs showed that most local violence tends to be committed by a relatively small number of young men and teen boys who share certain characteristics. Roughly 80% of people who committed murder in the parish during the last decade grew up in our community. Around 70% did not complete high school, and 60% lived in neighborhoods where high poverty is persistent during childhood.

Effective interventions could include school-based engagement among local children through early-childhood readiness, chronic-absence reduction, behavioral health supports, and intensive literacy and math tutoring, all of which are focused on the children who are most at risk.

Data shows that the cost of these efforts is relatively low. For example, effective tutoring programs for elementary-aged children can be delivered for as little as \$350 per child. This is far cheaper than the costs of violence, which are estimated at \$3.5 million in direct costs for a single homicide in our community.

## INFANT MORTALITY

Infant mortality is defined as death during a child's first year of life. Though some infant deaths are due to genetic causes, most are preventable. This includes causes such as complications of prematurity and low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome, and unintentional injuries.

The health of a baby is also closely related to the health of their mother. When pregnant women suffer from conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes, the risk of infant mortality increases.

Infant deaths are over 70% worse in East Baton Rouge Parish than in the country as a whole and slightly above the average for the State of Louisiana. Though the number of these premature deaths has declined in recent years, between 40 and 50 newborns and infants still die each year within the parish.

Enhanced educational programs for expectant mothers as well as in-home visitations with nurses before and after a baby is born could help contribute to decreasing this cause of premature death. Successful programs in these areas have demonstrated significant positive change in other communities and can serve as a model for the parish.

## KIDNEY DISEASE

Kidney disease occurs when structural damage to the kidney organs prevents them from functioning properly. The most common cause of this condition is the presence of type 2 diabetes. However, the risk of developing it is also linked to other factors, such as obesity, high blood pressure, and auto-immune disorders like lupus.

The most effective ways to prevent early deaths due to kidney disease are to help individuals develop healthy lifestyles and to increase screening rates for high blood pressure and early stage insulin resistance. Once diagnosed, these conditions can be treated via medication. Initiatives to expand the reach of educational diabetes prevention programs and to provide consumers with more information on high levels of sugar and salt in certain types of food can also be helpful.

## CONCLUSION

Increasing life expectancy can be complicated in an area as large as East Baton Rouge Parish. However, the analyses shared in this brief provide a clear roadmap for where local leaders can concentrate their efforts to make the greatest impact. If East Baton Rouge can reach the U.S. average in the five causes discussed in this brief, the premature death rate would decline by around 25% in the community.

View this complete briefing and other installations of the Opportunity Data Project at [OpportunityBTR.org](https://OpportunityBTR.org)





# THE GIVING COLLECTIVE

## A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS

BY SARAH BONGIORNI | PHOTOS BY DARLENE AGUILLARD

Expanded back-office operations don't usually come with a back story of hurricanes, human endurance, and transformational rebuilding to protect people and places against future storms.

Yet the intersection of those forces shaped the Foundation's expansion of services such as accounting, legal guidance, investment management and board governance in support of a network of corporate, family and community foundations across Louisiana.

The Giving Collective network comprises 13—soon 14—supporting organizations, each governed by their own board of directors and mission. Network members choose the back-office services they want on an a la carte basis depending on their needs.

Reducing costs through economies of scale and freeing members to focus on philanthropic efforts are key goals, but there is a larger idea at work, too.

"We are better together," said Lauren Crapanzano Jumonville, the Foundation's senior vice president of Enterprise Strategy, who oversees the team that provides and coordinates shared services to network members. "We want to help foundations have maximum impact in their communities."

Offering services through a

unified network became part of the Foundation's business model during strategic planning nearly four years ago. It provides a single point of entry for services that also includes shared technology, grant tracking and payment processing.

A history of collaboration on disaster response lay the groundwork for the back-office expansion. In fact, disaster response has long been a unifying focus of the Foundation's relationship to The Giving Collective's two community foundation members.

The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana has been a Foundation partner since 2008, when it began its relationship with BRAF as a supporting organization. It looks to BRAF for accounting, legal guidance and investment of donor funds.

President and CEO Sara Judson describes the back-office network as a "big deal" for her organization and one that fits with the Foundation's commitment to collaboration.

"We've had opportunities for investment with the Foundation that otherwise we would not have had," Judson says.

Its ties to BRAF took on new significance when Hurricane Laura slammed into the Louisiana coast on August 27, 2020. The Foundation's deep experience in disaster response—

including after hurricanes Rita and Katrina and the 2016 floods—positioned the Lake Charles-based foundation to respond quickly to short- and longer-term recovery needs, explains Judson.

**“We’ve had opportunities for investment with the Foundation that otherwise we would not have had.”**

— Sara Judson

"Because of our being a supporting organization, we had access to that expertise," Judson says.

The partnership helped the foundation move fast before and after the storm. The day before Laura hit, a relief and recovery fund was already up and ready to accept donations, Judson notes. CFSWLA worked with the Foundation's communication team to identify potential donors and craft and communicate an effective message for maximum response.

Judson and her staff of three—



BRAF's Enterprise Strategy management team:  
Shermaine Haymer, Patience Butler-Gasper,  
Lauren Crapanzano Jumonville, and Devon DeShields



Leslie Landry, Sara Judson, and Chris Meyer at a recent meeting at the new BRAF office location.

counting Judson herself—worked out of BRAF’s Baton Rouge offices for five weeks after Laura tore up communication infrastructure.

“Their team became our team,” Judson says.

Fast action and collaboration paid off: Storm-recovery donations began coming in while Laura still churned in the Gulf. All told, the Foundation’s relief and recovery fund raised more

than \$7 million from all 50 states and 10 foreign countries. It made its first storm-relief grants of \$250,000 each to the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and Catholic Charities about a week after the storm.

“Those are dollars we would not have had without BRAF,” Judson says.

Disaster-response collaboration is still more fundamental to the Northshore Foundation’s ties to

BRAF: The Foundation used some Katrina donations to establish the Northshore Foundation in 2007 after an influx of residents from storm-ravaged New Orleans created new needs on the north side of Lake Pontchartrain.

Katrina donations also paid for an earlier feasibility study that showed Northshore residents wanted a community foundation



and provided seed money to help the new foundation support Northshore not-for-profits with track records of effective local impact.

“So BRAF seeded the opening of our organization with the intention of us being able to go out and make grants to those still recovering from Katrina,” said Leslie Landry, president and CEO of the Northshore Foundation, which has looked to BRAF for back-office services like accounting and legal support since day one.

All three community foundations also meet at least twice yearly to share insights and information about potential and ongoing civic-leadership initiatives in their communities.

Judson and Landry say back-office collaboration builds on the access to experience, support and resources that make the network valuable to supporting organizations—and that are especially critical when disaster strikes.

“You know you are not alone,” Landry says. “The biggest thing for us is having deep relationships that allow us to better respond to our partners.”

After Laura, for instance, Landry’s team headed to Baton Rouge to help Judson’s team of three, which included an employee who had been on the job for mere weeks. Landry and her staff made calls, took calls and jumped in however they were needed to help raise funds in the weeks after the storm.

“It is a small foundation, and we helped with the capacity to respond to offers for help as calls were coming in so fast,” Landry says.

By accident of geography, Baton Rouge’s location adds to the value of the arrangement.

“BRAF is a great convener for all of us,” Landry adds. “It’s all of us helping each other.”

Recovery expert Paul Rainwater worked closely with BRAF and regional leaders as executive director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority in the years after Rita and Katrina.

BRAF’s work included creation of the LRA Support Foundation to raise private funds for research and planning related to the unprecedented rebuilding effort.

“The biggest thing for us is having deep relationships that allow us to better respond to our partners.”

— Leslie Landry

Rainwater points out that there was no ready blueprint for LRA and other elements of the recovery work. The closest model was the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. that guided New York City’s recovery after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Funds raised through the support foundation paid for work by world-class planners to inform the years-long recovery work, work that continues to shape discussions about storm mitigation and response today.

“We were doing things that hadn’t really been done before here,” Rainwater says.

He sees a common thread running through BRAF’s collaborative approach to back-office operations and disaster response: The Foundation is good at identifying a role for itself that removes obstacles for partner organizations. He points to its role in collaborative projects as varied and complex as development of The Water Campus and creation of a regional automotive mechanic-training initiative.

“It understands where it fits and what role it can play, but it doesn’t push,” Rainwater says. “It identifies and responds to needs to provide extra bandwidth. It’s a great model.”

As elsewhere, the need for effective

collaboration—and the role of foundations in those efforts—will likely grow in south Louisiana as elsewhere as cash-strapped local governments look to public-private partnerships to take the lead on facilities and initiatives they might have spearheaded in the past, Rainwater notes.

If disaster response is the back story for the Foundation’s back-office expansion, it’s an unfinished one. A telling real-time example: BRAF’s track record in urban redevelopment and storm rebuilding helped the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana secure a \$2.5 million donation from Lake Charles native and Yahoo! co-founder David Filo and his wife, Angela, for a master plan for the city after Hurricane Laura.

The resulting 50-year resilience master plan helped the city win a \$40-million HUD grant for a 562-unit mixed-income neighborhood in downtown Lake Charles.

Construction of the first affordable-housing element of the plan, Just Imagine SWLA, began late last year. It won the Congress for the New Urbanism Charter Award in May 2024.

Those accomplishments would not have happened without access to BRAF’s deep experience in disaster recovery and master planning, Judson says.

“Because of our partnership we could really leverage this grant from the Filos,” Judson says. “Amazing things that will change Lake Charles for the better forever have happened because of our connection to BRAF.” ■

Learn more about disaster recovery efforts through BRAF





## THE YEAR AHEAD

### Community Foundation Leaders Share Their Perspectives on the Trends in Philanthropy in 2026



**SARA JUDSON**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

Our Community Foundation’s tagline is connecting people who care with causes that matter. And that is just what we do with people, families, companies, local governments and nonprofits.

We’re seeing that individual and corporate donors and volunteers don’t just want to give; they want to see the difference they’re making. They want their time, energy, and resources to truly matter. **When people pool their strengths, big things start to happen** from advancing coastal protection projects, to reimagining our lakefront and downtown, to expanding affordable and resilient housing.

Whether it’s utilizing a Donor Advised Fund, Qualified Charitable Distributions to support a specific nonprofit, or creating a legacy that allows the future Community Foundation SWLA to help the region thrive.

**LESLIE LANDRY**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
NORTHSHORE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Philanthropy is increasingly collective; donors, nonprofits, businesses, and public partners are looking to community foundations to connect the dots. Our role is evolving from being primarily grant makers to becoming strategic leaders in community problem-solving. In 2026, we must continue to focus on informed decision-making, transparency, and collaboration across sectors. We are known for stewarding resources wisely, but also the communities go-to nonprofit expert in the region—identifying opportunities and driving initiatives that strengthen our communities.

**Community foundations must remain nimble, adaptive, and forward-thinking.** In this landscape, our greatest value lies in our deep local knowledge, our long-term perspective, and our commitment to building stronger communities not just for today, but for generations to come.



**CHRIS MEYER**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION

Across the country and here in Baton Rouge, giving is changing. Donors are looking for clear results, better coordination, and new ways to create lasting impact beyond traditional grants. In response, Community Foundations are stepping into a bigger role by bringing people together, sharing reliable information, and helping move resources where they can do the most good.

In 2026, BRAF will continue to connect public and private partners, strengthen local nonprofits, and listen closely to our community as we invest with care and purpose. **By being proactive and strategic, we can help philanthropic dollars go further**—supporting affordable housing, small businesses, and trusted community institutions today, while preserving resources so they can continue serving our region well into the future.



# BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF PHILANTHROPISTS



The Baton Rouge Area Foundation works tirelessly to cultivate a stronger philanthropic community by fostering a culture of **giving, collaboration, and social responsibility.**

There are multiple ways to partner with the Foundation to accomplish your charitable goals. **Contact a member of BRAF's Philanthropic Impact team** to chart your path.



[braf.org/donors](http://braf.org/donors) | [cgraves@braf.org](mailto:cgraves@braf.org)



# INSPIRING COMMUNITY

THIS NOVEL IDEA IS TRANSFORMING  
HOWELL PARK ONE HOOP, NOTE, AND  
PARTNERSHIP AT A TIME.

BY AMY ALEXANDER | PHOTOS BY DARLENE AGUILLARD

There’s something magical about a new basketball court. At the Inspiration Center, the paint is ready and gleaming.

The nets wait for the first of a million slam dunks and swishes. The kids will come, with high fives, dropped dimes, squeaking shoes, and a little bit of good-hearted banter.

From nearly any point inside the Inspiration Center, you can see through to another program area. Included in those is a glassed-in law enforcement office, where transparency is the message.

That was the goal from the start. Police Chief T.J. Morse says the project grew out of a conviction that public safety is a shared responsibility. “We can’t arrest our way out of crime,” he says. “We need everybody to come to the table.”

The 25,000-square-foot facility brings athletics, arts, mentorship, and technology together under one roof. Operated by the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Louisiana, it will feature tutoring rooms, a recording studio, an EA Sports gaming suite, and a full-sized basketball court.

“This center serves the entire family by filling gaps related to job readiness, mentorship, education, nutrition and overall health,” says Clay Young, Chair of the Louisiana Law Enforcement & Criminal Justice Foundation.

What started as a wish rapidly gained mission momentum in Young’s mind. He dreamed of inspiring kids in North Baton Rouge.

He shared the concept with Angel Nelson, CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Louisiana. They clicked. Nelson had long been brainstorming

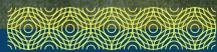
a center where kids could play and imagine their lives, then connect with mentors who could help them achieve their goals.

“He had the idea, and I had the blueprints,” she recalls. The partners were able to secure a \$5 million state appropriation from then-Governor John Bel Edwards, plus funds from the city of Baton Rouge and additional support through federal New Markets Tax Credits.

The project sits in the 70805 ZIP code, an area short on grocery stores, restaurants, and youth resources. To Nelson, that makes the center transformative.

“A lot of kids don’t have anywhere to go,” she says. “This is huge.”

The Center includes a washer and dryer for families who need them, showers, separate wings for younger



CLAY YOUNG visits the Inspiration Center as construction wraps up on the basketball court.



Chief T.J. Morse, Baton Rouge Police Department

children and teens, and spaces for mentoring and tutoring.

Access requires commitment, however. Morse explains that families will apply and take part in meetings or classes before using the amenities. “It’s not just walking in off the street to play basketball,” he says.

“We’ll never turn a child away,” Nelson adds. “But we do want families to have buy-in. When parents participate, kids see that they are valued.”

Because multiple grants are paid out on a reimbursement basis, construction faced potential delays. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation solved that problem with a short-term bridge loan.

Chris Meyer, BRAF’s president and CEO, notes that this type of financing has become a tool for keeping civic projects on track. He says bridge funds allow organizations to draw down construction money while waiting for public dollars to be reimbursed. It’s a practical example of how the Foundation is blending philanthropy and impact investment.

Young compared the process to a team sport. In essence, BRAF provided the assist that kept the game alive.

Edmund Giering, BRAF’s general counsel, says BRAF’s approach begins with collaboration.

“We start with yes,” he says. His goal is to keep the legal process simple enough, even when it gets complex, so that partners can stay engaged and confident.

From its clean windows to the transparent central office, the Inspiration Center’s design makes visibility a live presence. The law-enforcement area sits in the middle of the plan, ringed with glass, so officers and youth can see one another throughout the day.

During early architectural brainstorming sessions, the conversation centered on service. Architecture can’t fix inequity, but it



## BRIDGE FUNDING: HOW IT WORKS

### What It Is:

Bridge funding is short-term financing that keeps construction or programming moving while grant reimbursements are pending.

### Why It Matters:

Many government and tax-credit programs pay only after expenses are submitted, which can take months. Without interim cash, progress can grind to a halt.

### How It Bolstered the Inspiration Center:

- Construction of the Inspiration Center relied on state, city, and federal funds, all reimbursable.
- BRAF advanced a loan so the Law Enforcement & Criminal Justice Foundation could draw construction funds immediately.
- When reimbursements arrived, the loan was repaid, freeing the money for the next community project.

### The Reward:

Bridge funding keeps local contractors working and builds trust. It's a quiet assist that turns delayed dollars into visible progress.



ANGEL NELSON visits with students during Boys & Girls Club activities at an elementary school in Baton Rouge.



Rendering of the basketball court. Courtesy of Williams Architecture.

can remove barriers between people with open corridors, natural light, and durable, welcoming materials that make the building feel like a commons rather than an institution.

The Center's programming, led by the Boys & Girls Clubs, extends beyond recreation. Nelson lists a range of evidence-based programs, everything from character and leadership development, homework help, STEM building, bullying prevention, and conflict-resolution training, alongside creative outlets such as recording, painting, and gaming.

She calls the high-tech amenities "carrots we can dangle." The real goal, she says, is to draw kids into mentorship and learning. Officers assigned to the space will work side by side with youth, not as enforcers but as guides.

They can see the kids and the kids can see them, she says. That visibility builds trust. Morse agrees. He wants his officers to spend time with neighbors when no one is in crisis "so they can see each other as human beings and not just the uniforms."

Basketball and music anchor

## THE SOUND OF THRIVING

Music has long been a lifeline in American communities, especially in the south, where rhythm has carried both sorrow and strength across generations. From work songs and spirituals to gospel, blues, and jazz, every note has doubled as testimony. Music is a way to name and contain struggles and to imagine better things.

The Inspiration Center's recording studio carries that lineage forward. Teens can lay down beats—engineered sounds that can be stitched together to make songs. They can record verses or learn audio production. It's all about expression.

“Kids want to have a voice, they want to be respected, and they want adults to understand what they are going through. They want to be heard.”

- Angel Nelson  
CEO, Boys and Girls Clubs  
of Metro Louisiana



the Center’s cultural heart. Morse emphasized that the full-size basketball gym would be a major draw for local youth — the only indoor court available in the area. It’s the reason young people show up.

Once inside, they discover other opportunities.

Music offers a different kind of growth. The new recording will let teens record songs, experiment with beats, and learn production skills. Nelson says it gives youth a voice—and a reason to show up.

Chief Morse remembers the neighborhood from his earliest patrol days. As a rookie officer, he often saw the same eight- or nine-year-old boy

waving from his porch. Over the years, they stayed in touch. Today, that boy leads a local nonprofit.

For Morse, that story proves how small relationships can resonate across decades.

“That’s the heart of this,” he says.

Young believes the center will multiply stories like Morse’s. It’s all about getting to know the people who live and play on the blocks near the Center.

“Community input was invaluable during this process,” Young says. “We wanted to be sure we were offering something the community could really use.”

Nelson, Young, and other

stakeholders spent nearly two years conducting community walks and neighborhood meetings before construction began.

“We listened first,” Nelson says.

Residents talked about jobs, food access and the need for mentors. “This building is a response to what they told us.”

Meyer called that outreach essential, reflecting BRAF’s data-driven approach to investing with input from the impacted community.

“This is an all-hands-on-deck kind of situation,” Young says. “We all care about our community, and we want to see it be as good as it can be.”

As completion nears, Morse

Aerial view as the Inspiration Center nears completion.





envisions using the space for police graduations and community events. Nelson imagines a place alive from morning tutoring to evening open gym. Meyer sees a model that could be replicated across the region.

Young hopes the impact will compound, so that years from now, alumni of the Center return as mentors themselves. He calls the building a promise.

“Five or ten years from now, I hope we will have impacted crime, quality of life and the overall improvement of the area around the building,” he says. “This project is a testament to collaboration.” ■



Groundbreaking in 2023.



# THE POWER OF A DONOR ADVISED FUND: A CONVERSATION WITH Matt Kubicek

PHOTO BY COLLIN RICHIE

## What initially inspired you to open a donor advised fund at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation?

[My wife] Kim and I loved the idea of setting aside funds to give away. We like the flexibility and the freedom a DAF provides to us in having funds available when we see an opportunity in our community or the non-profits we love such as Christian Youth Theater Baton Rouge. I already had a wonderful experience helping CYTBR set up their endowment fund with BRAF and felt good about BRAF's governance and stewardship of funds, so it was an easy choice for us to open our donor advised fund with BRAF as well.

## How does having a DAF change the way you think about and approach charitable giving?

It gives us freedom to simply give and not to need to think through all of the many concerns about timing, taxes, and if we have the funds at the moment. We're ready at any moment.

## Why start a DAF instead of giving directly to nonprofits?

Could we have used a cheaper DAF than BRAF? Sure. Would the cost difference have mattered? Not at all. And that's really the only benefit elsewhere. BRAF's

investment stewardship, service, and communication are all phenomenal.

## What made BRAF the right partner for you compared with setting up a fund elsewhere?

Sometimes we are ready to give financially at times when it's not the most prudent for the nonprofit. As an example, some nonprofits can't handle large lump sums very well from a stewardship point of view and need to receive it in chunks. Other nonprofits may have certain windows of time where they are launching building funds or matching gifts. And sometimes, we just don't know who we want funds to go to yet, but we know we want to set funds aside. There are so many reasons that a DAF makes sense to us compared to simply gifting straight to a nonprofit only.

## What do you appreciate most about the flexibility or simplicity of managing your charitable giving through a DAF?

It's great—I can control the timing of the gift from a tax point of view (i.e. gift long-term gains of stock and avoiding the tax on the gain while gaining an itemized tax deduction on the full value) *and* I can outsource essentially the rest for BRAF to figure out. I have enough things to keep up

with... I like that BRAF can handle the rest.

## Can you share an example of a grant or project supported through your DAF that has been especially meaningful to you?

CYT Baton Rouge has stolen our hearts and impacted our lives for good and for the better! Of course CYT uses theater to build character in young adults, but the impact carries far beyond what we could have imagined. CYT has transformed our family and hundreds of families in the Baton Rouge area.

When CYT launched an endowment to build long-term financial stability, we couldn't stand by and not join in. We want as many people to benefit from CYT as possible and that's what the BRAF-managed endowment will do for CYT. Our BRAF DAF was just one of the ways we can do our part to contribute!

## How has working with BRAF's staff influenced your philanthropy—whether through research, guidance, or learning about new opportunities in the community?

Honestly, it's really just the kindness and courtesy that BRAF's staff has shown in all of their communication with us. That's been a real blessing and it is much appreciated.

## What would you say to someone who is considering opening a donor advised fund but hasn't taken the leap yet?

Truly, it has to be the right fit, *but* if you are a charitably inclined person I'd go ahead and open and fund the account. You don't have to have it all figured out today to get started. Just know what amount you feel comfortable giving over the next 3-5 years and you've probably discovered a reasonable ballpark amount you could fund into a DAF at this point.

Who to gift the funds to can largely be answered sometime in the future rather than today.

**What values or goals guide your philanthropy, and how does your DAF help you live those out?**

We have been blessed tremendously and in so many ways, financially as well. But that is not everyone's story. In fact, there are some on this earth who literally have nothing. No food, no clothes, no shelter, no family, no help, no love. It is completely not sensible that we would do anything but share our abundance with others in need. It's the only reasonable thing to do. Just like we teach our children to share, why would we do anything else as adults? We've been given so much and loved so much, we have to share that. God has placed this sort of love in our hearts; it has to be shared. A DAF just helps provide a very easy and effective structure to do so.

**In your view, what role do community foundations like BRAF play in strengthening the long-term well-being of the region?**

The needs around us all are tremendous, and we know that money doesn't ever solve that need by itself. Instead, it takes intentional, diligent, and strategic people to tackle the challenges, often one person at a time. It's time consuming, it's hard, and it is incredibly underfunded work. It's not glamorous and it's not even often appreciated. But the impact on our community and our world is incredible. That's the work of the nonprofit world. Hard jobs that many of us have no idea how to even attempt. BRAF helps stand in the gap and bring the resources to those who may have some of the greatest positive impacts to our community long term. ■



# Making Waves in Mid City

## THE YMCA'S MODERN TRANSFORMATION

BY AMY ALEXANDER | PHOTOS BY COLLIN RICHIE

Tammy Abshire learned how to swim one sultry New Orleans summer when she was a kid.

There was that uncanny mix of excitement and fear over the din of music, splashing, and the perpetual, peppy voices of swim instructors and lifeguards unleashing their can-do attitudes on the next generation of soon-to-be confident Australian crawlers.

"I don't recall a lot of childhood

memories," says the senior vice president of philanthropic impact at BRAF. "But that I remember—and it was at the Y."

Now, Abshire helps nonprofits increase cash flow through Organization Funds at the Foundation. The Capital Area YMCA harnessed its Organization Fund to stretch its resources for the build-out of a brand new, 30,000 square foot A.C. Lewis branch in mid-city. As a result

of the build, local water babies will learn to paddle in a facility created to strengthen both families and the city's quality of life.

"It's been amazing to see the transformation," says Amy Province, who serves as the Y's Board Chair.

Walk into the sparkling new branch and you're likely to see a school of new swimmers clutching the pool's edge as sunlight gleams on the water, figuring out how to flex their muscles, hold their breath, and bend their limbs in a synchronized effort that harnesses buoyancy and bubbles.

Building out the new space was also a coordinated civic exercise calling upon leadership, vision, and strong financial stewardship. The project inspired collaboration among the Y, Bearing Point Properties, Womack Builders, Coleman Partners Architects, and BRAF.

"When the partnership opportunity was first presented to the Y board, you could feel the energy in the room elevating with big dreams," Province says. "The discussion felt less like a meeting and more like the start of something transformative."

Abshire describes her role as one focused on fiscal scaffolding—supporting nonprofits not only as they grow programs but also as they



Tammy Abshire, Senior Vice President of Philanthropic Impact at BRAF



Special offer for use for the  
Movement Matters Program  
Counselors & Therapists  
12.999 - 1.000



SEAN ELLIOTT and AMY PROVINCE in the gym  
at the new facility.



strengthen the financial foundation that allows those programs to last.

“My role with the organization is helping with capacity building and helping them invest in their financial sustainability,” she explains. “A nonprofit can co-invest with BRAF to access our investment portfolio with Goldman Sachs, and it allows them to really look at different strategies to support long-term sustainability.”

These Organization Funds are uniquely flexible tools. Nonprofits can structure them as endowments, where contributions are invested for lasting growth, or as spenddown investment vehicles designed to support nearer-horizon projects.

“Some nonprofits create an endowment where funds are invested in a long-term strategy,” Abshire says. “And some invest in short-term funds. They’re able to withdraw from the invested earnings, depending on what their organization needs.”

Organizations establish these funds

for a variety of reasons—sometimes to secure future program stability, sometimes as part of a capital campaign, and sometimes because donors contribute major gifts that exceed the nonprofit’s immediate operating capacity. “A donor may give them a significant gift that they have not budgeted for,” Abshire says. “This allows them to continue the mission of the organization while stewarding that gift wisely.”

The YMCA of the Capital Area was one of the earliest partners in this work. The Y established its organization fund at BRAF in 1997 as part of its long-term mission to promote healthy, supportive communities throughout the region. For decades the fund has helped the Y grow its reach—from youth development and after-school programs to wellness initiatives, water safety and family-centered support.

The A.C. Lewis branch stands as a testament to that sustained vision,

reflecting the evolving ways the Y defines and fulfills its purpose in Baton Rouge. Province can still recall those early talks that led to the collaboration among Y’s stakeholders and partners.

“Around the table, board members spoke with both nostalgia and excitement. It was a chance to reimagine the Y as a modern, welcoming space that evolves with our community and continues the Y’s mission to strengthen community for all.”

For decades, the Y’s facility on Foster Drive has been a gathering spot for Baton Rouge residents in search of water, community, games, and exercise. One of the first YMCA branches in Baton Rouge, it was both beloved and beginning to show signs of wear and tear as the years flew by.

“The old building was full of memories, but the upkeep had become costly, and it simply couldn’t meet the community’s needs anymore,” says Province. “Seeing it transform into a

## THE Y'S TRANSFORMATION TIMELINE ONE BRICK AT A TIME

The original A.C. Lewis YMCA on South Foster Drive in Mid City Baton Rouge was more than a gym. It had been a community anchor since its 1963 opening. By the early 2020s its infrastructure lagged behind the ambition of the surrounding neighborhood. The decision wasn't just to update, it was to rebuild and last long enough to see children grow up and bring their own kids to the facility.

In **January 2023** the YMCA announced a partnership with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the Office of Community Development, and developer Bearing Point Properties to build a new 27,000-square-foot facility plus 100+ mixed-income apartments. During this stage the Y also set up a temporary location at 6757 Florida Boulevard so that services could continue during demolition and construction.

From spring through winter 2024 the framing, concrete pours, and interior infrastructure progressed steadily.

On April 28, 2025 the new A.C. Lewis YMCA opened to the public with its full design: heated and chilled pools, a two-story gym, indoor track, sauna/steam room, and more.

2023

On **July 22, 2023** the pools at the old Y closed as the site began its transition. Demolition began in earnest in October and November of 2023. The outdoor pool was filled in with dirt; the basketball gymnasium was torn down.

2024

By **December 13–16, 2023**, the indoor pool had been demolished and site prepared for foundation work. Nearly 500–600 pilings were driven to support both the apartment and YMCA structures.

2025

The adjacent apartment complex completed around the same time. The builder lists the apartments at 136,000+ sq ft and the Y at approximately 26,000 sq ft.



bright, open, and modern facility feels like the heart of the Y has been renewed.”

The new spot on Foster gleams. There are two outdoor pools, a full gym, classrooms, childcare facilities, a teen room, and, steps away, a four-story apartment complex where teachers, police officers, and young families grow their livelihoods through affordable housing that invites civic engagement at the Y.

Coleman Partners, the architectural firm that designed the new facility, has ample experience in building spaces that facilitate the experience of those who gather there. A recognizable array of churches, schools, offices, hotels, and residential developments bear the firm’s name.

The new Y stands as a bold claim made from brick, water, and great ideas: Wellness, housing, and hope for the future belong in the same space.

“Baton Rouge is certainly a community where the YMCA is

valued,” says Sean Elliott, who took over as CEO of the YMCA of the Capital Area in May when former CEO Christian Engle became CEO of YMCA of the Suncoast.

Elliott learned how to swim at the YMCA in Philadelphia. He was a strong swimmer, joined the swim team and eventually worked as a lifeguard and swim coach at the Y.

“My brothers and sisters all went to the Y,” he recalls. “That’s where we hung out and where our friends were. That’s the power of the YMCA. It’s a place that no matter who you are, no matter where you went to school, no matter how much money you make, it’s a place where everybody belongs.”

After college, Elliott went to work full time at the Philadelphia Y. He was then tapped to head up the Y in Green Bay, Wisconsin. “Baton Rouge spoke to me as a community that deserves a great YMCA and a YMCA that is going to meet growing community needs.” ■

## The YMCA Way to Survive a Major Project

Change is sometimes terrifying and always brings logistical and scheduling gauntlets. Amy Province serves up these tips for making it to the ribbon cutting.

1. Stay mission-focused. When you are reaching toward something important, the unforeseen challenges become speed bumps rather than impossible climbs.
2. Talk, talk, talk. Communicate with your team, stakeholders, and community to help keep the mission alive in their minds, too.
3. The longer it takes, the more teamwork matters. Never forget that you’re not in this alone, and remind those who are working alongside you that they aren’t alone, either.
4. Keep dreaming. Stay excited about the future—enthusiasm illuminates the path forward, even when there are a lot of obstacles.





## MORE THAN JUST A GYM

That was the idea behind the world's first YMCA in London, where a bible study for embroiderers and drapery makers in 1844 grew to become a "home away from home."

Now, the Y serves more than 60 million people in 120 countries. Some locations boast libraries. Others have health clinics and mental health counselors. The YMCA in Green Bay, Sean Elliott says, has a credit union inside.

"The Y is known everywhere else for not just a workout facility," Tammy Abshire says. "They have affordable housing, they have camps, all these other activities that are associated with the mission, but a lot of what the Y is known for in Baton Rouge is workout facilities."

As the Y planned to replace the aging facilities at the A.C. Lewis location, it became as clear as a deep, crystal pool: Affordable housing should be an integral component of the new build. Bearing Point Properties joined to design housing that would stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the fitness center.

From the street, the YMCA's façade of brick and steel mirrors morning light. Inside, the floor plan moves with a delightful rhythm: stairs opening onto a track that circles the gym, windows framing treetops, the sound of sneakers meeting the squeak of basketballs below. The building itself invites movement.

Upstairs, members pause between sets to watch swimmers through the glass. Downstairs, toddlers learn balance in the childcare room while their parents take yoga. Outside, the water shivers.

The open sightlines and interior transparency were intentional, meant to help members feel part of something larger than themselves. It's a flexible space, designed to adapt, over time, to the unique needs of its community.

Next door, The Point at Mid City's balconies overlook the complex. In the afternoon, residents stroll over in sandals for a class or coffee. The proximity dissolves old boundaries between "service provider" and "neighbor," according to project documents from Bearing Point Properties and the YMCA of the Capital Area, which describe the site as a "shared wellness campus."

Following the build-out of the new Y on Foster, Elliott envisions strengthening the brick, mortar, and glass facilities by reaching out to other nonprofits—think schools, civic groups, and youth organizations—that share the Y's mission.

"There are a lot of nonprofits doing good but repetitive work," he says. "I always use the term mowing the same lawn. There is a lot more opportunity for collaboration and partnerships to make the community stronger."





## CLOSING THE SWIM GAP

**Swimming is fun.** But it's also a vital life skill that advances the quality of life and safety in a community. In Louisiana, drowning is the third-leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 0–14, says the Department of Health.

Between 2019–2021, **most child drownings occurred in residential swimming pools**, and 60 children aged 0–14 drowned in the state, according to Partners for Family Health.

National data from the CDC shows that **formal swim lessons substantially reduce drowning risk.** According to the American Red Cross, 79% of children from households under \$50,000 have “few to no swimming skills.”

### BY TARGETING SWIM-SKILL DEVELOPMENT, THE YMCA:

- Shrinks the safety gap in a high-risk state.
- Gives local children the chance to learn early, under the same roof as surrounding community wellness resources.
- Creates lifelong skills that allow individuals to enjoy swimming pools throughout their lives.

## JUST KEEP SWIMMING

The YMCA owns more water globally than any other organization.

“One of the things we are very passionate about is teaching every kid how to swim,” Elliott says. “Last year we taught 3,900 kids to swim for free, and we have a more audacious goal moving forward that we want to teach every second grader in the school districts we serve at least safety around water.”



Sean Elliott, CEO of YMCA



# CELEBRATE OUR STAFF

THE FOUNDATION TAKES PRIDE IN OUR STAFF'S DEDICATION TO PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO CONTINUALLY ENHANCING THEIR SKILLS TO BETTER SERVE OUR COMMUNITY. WE ARE PROUD TO CELEBRATE THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS, WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE BETTERMENT OF THEMSELVES, OUR ORGANIZATION, AND THE COMMUNITY WE SERVE.



**TAMMY ABSHIRE, CFRE**  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF  
PHILANTHROPIC IMPACT

Tammy Abshire has been promoted to senior vice president of philanthropic impact. In this new role, she will continue leading the Center for Nonprofit Excellence while also guiding the team that supports the Foundation's donors and fundholders, advancing work that strengthens impact across the region.



**EMILY GLASCOCK**  
DIRECTOR OF  
PHILANTHROPIC IMPACT

Emily Glascock has been selected for the Leadership Livingston Class of 2026. As a member of this cohort, Emily joins 24 other local leaders to explore Livingston Parish and the ways they can make their community better. The program aims to develop informed, connected, and community-minded leaders through monthly immersive sessions and collaborative projects.



**TRAVIS HUTCHINS, CAP®**  
DIRECTOR OF  
PHILANTHROPIC ADVISING

Travis Hutchins has completed his training to become a 21/64 Certified Advisor. Through this nationally recognized program, Travis gained tools that help guide multi-generational families and donors in connecting their values with their giving, strengthening their ability to create lasting impact.



**LAUREN CRAPANZANO  
JUMONVILLE**  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
OF ENTERPRISE

Lauren Crapanzano Jumonville has been promoted to senior vice president of enterprise. In this expanded role, she oversees the Foundation's core enterprise functions including technology, human resources, supporting organizations, disaster recovery efforts, and facilities operations, ensuring the systems that power our work remain strong and responsive to the region's needs.



**ALLY RENNHOFF  
MARTINEZ**  
DIRECTOR OF  
NONPROFIT CONSULTING

Ally Rennhoff Martinez has earned her BoardSource Certificate of Nonprofit Board Consulting. This credential recognizes her expertise in effective nonprofit governance and equips her with advanced skills to support boards in their leadership, development, and decision making.



**LEAH TAYLOR**  
DIRECTOR OF CIVIC  
LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES

Leah Taylor has been promoted to director of civic leadership initiatives. Since joining the Foundation in 2024 she has been an invaluable contributor, expanding our work in early childhood education and strengthening key partnerships across the community. In her new role, she will continue to guide civic leadership efforts that help move the region forward.



## PLAN BR III COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSES JULY AND NOVEMBER



## THE ERNEST J. GAINES AWARD FOR LITERARY EXCELLENCE OCTOBER



## WELCOME CELEBRATION AND OPEN HOUSE OCTOBER



## SIP AND SORT FOR A CAUSE NOVEMBER



## A Fresh Space for Fresh Food

The Big River Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance has spent nearly three decades connecting Louisiana farmers with local families through the Red Stick Farmers Market. With growers traveling in from 17 parishes and a recent study showing a \$6.7 million economic impact in the last year alone, the organization’s reach and influence continue to expand. So when its longtime home base, the Main Street Market, began showing its age, a renovation wasn’t just overdue, it was essential.

At more than 20 years old, the market had become cramped, outdated, and increasingly difficult to navigate. Narrow hallways, limited restrooms, and the absence of a dedicated programming space made it harder for BREADA to fully carry out its mission. The decision to renovate was driven by both necessity and opportunity: a chance to modernize the building, meet state standards, and create a space that better serves farmers, downtown workers, and the community at large.

During construction, tenants temporarily moved out and farmers shifted to outdoor market placements along Fifth and Main Street. The arrangement required careful coordination, but vendors and customers adapted quickly. Meanwhile, crews tackled major repairs first, updating and repairing the “big-ticket” items like electrical, plumbing, roofing, and HVAC. With the big fixes out of the way, the team was able to focus on new flooring, fresh paint, and other cosmetic updates. Although a few delays extended the opening timeline, BREADA’s staff are confident the delay was worth the wait.

Visitors will now find more room to sit, dine, and move comfortably through the space, whether you’re grabbing lunch or maneuvering a stroller. Refreshed branding throughout the building better reflects BREADA’s mission and the energy of the market community. And at the heart of the renovation is a new state-of-the-art Teaching Kitchen, equipped with cameras for live streamed demonstrations and seating that can flex for classes, meetings, or culinary events.

Among the new and exciting additions are a new coffee shop and four

new restaurants. River & Roots Market will serve sustainably sourced brews while offering weekday access to Red Stick Farmers Market goods. The new restaurants in market — Sapor Indian Fusion, The Cozy Griddle, Vivian’s Rotisserie & Grill, and Louisiana Creole Creations — are poised to become an even more vibrant downtown destination.

Main Street Market reopened in December and operates Monday through Saturday, welcoming visitors for breakfast, lunch, coffee, and an experience rooted in community.



COLLIN RICHIE

An aerial night rendering of a city waterfront development. In the foreground, a large steel truss bridge spans across a body of water. Along the waterfront, there is a vibrant festival area with a large crowd of people, colorful lighting, and a stage. Several boats, including sailboats and motorboats, are on the water. The background shows a dense urban area with numerous buildings, some of which are illuminated. The sky is dark with some clouds, and the overall scene is lit up with city lights and festival lights.

MORE THAN 3,000 community members participated in the Plan Baton Rouge III ideation process during 2025. With their feedback, consultants are charting a path to continue the growth of Downtown. Shown here is a rendering of some of their big ideas, which will be released to the public in Q1 2026.

Turn to page 12 or visit [PlanBatonRouge.com](http://PlanBatonRouge.com) to learn more about how the planning process unfolded.

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# PARTNERSHIP *makes it* POSSIBLE

There's more than one way to support our community, and BRAF is generating opportunities at every angle. We connect the right people to the right resources in pursuit of a healthy community that can access excellent education, achieve economic prosperity, sustain a high quality of life, live in safer neighborhoods, and display resilience in our changing world.



**YOUR PARTNERSHIP MAKES IT POSSIBLE. JOIN US!**

Memberships are available for individuals, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

**[BRAF.ORG/MEMBERSHIP](https://braf.org/membership)**