

**The Future Is Now:  
Building a Coalition for Progress in Ouachita Parish**

**A Proposal  
Developed for  
Government, Business, and Civic Leaders in Ouachita Parish  
In Response to the Need for Strategic Action  
To Address Unprecedented Community Growth**

**Respectfully Submitted**

**Ouachita Business Alliance  
A Coalition of Area Business Leaders**

**September 3, 2015**

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## ***Executive Summary***

Ouachita Parish is experiencing unprecedented job growth brought about by aggressive business development underway in the area. Projections suggest that more than 2000 jobs will be created through expanding IT, Data, Healthcare, and Manufacturing related growth in northeast Louisiana over the next three years.

This growth is being accelerated primarily because of the presence in our community of Louisiana's only Fortune 500 company. CenturyLink's presence here is a major driving force in this growth, followed closely by expanding healthcare. In addition, having both the University of Louisiana at Monroe and Delta Community College campuses located within the parish supports economic growth throughout the region.

CenturyLink's increasing influence in the international marketplace has led to a number of partnerships that have attracted businesses here further spurring job growth. The most notable of these partnerships to date is with IBM. IBM's new Applications Development and Innovation Center, to be located in the area adjacent to CenturyLink's corporate headquarters, alone will mean 400 additional new jobs for the area.

These partnerships have led not only to much-needed job creation, but also to an intense, competitive recruitment effort that reaches beyond Louisiana. With job opportunities available in many larger, more metropolitan locations, what will convince recruits to accept jobs and move their families here? How well, and how quickly, this area transforms itself into a community suitable for a Fortune 500 corporate presence within it, will determine success or failure.

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The Ouachita Business Alliance (referred to hereafter as "Alliance") a small group of business leaders from throughout the area, is proposing this plan as a first step toward addressing this critical transformation. With the plan's successful implementation, the area should have the underpinning necessary to support this growth. With so many new people moving here in a relatively short period of time, the strains on existing resources are already being felt.

The Alliance has conducted comprehensive research to determine the areas that must be addressed immediately. This research has involved not only assessing shortfalls in resources within the area, but also has included matching those shortfalls to data obtained through the recruitment process that catalogued reasons why recruits are, or are not, taking these new positions. While the Alliance recognizes that every entity has needs specific to its particular area of responsibility or jurisdiction, this group has looked beyond those individual needs and focused instead on creating a vision for our community as a whole. This approach was the

equivalent of conducting an extended study based on solid research data that resulted in this plan to support economic development parish-wide.

*The Alliance has identified five core categories of concern but with opportunities for improvement that are essential to successful recruitment and retention of these new recruits --- Education, Housing, Infrastructure, Beautification, and Quality of Life.*

During this process, the Alliance has identified five core categories of concern but with opportunities for improvement that are essential to successful recruitment and retention of these new recruits --- **Education, Housing, Infrastructure, Beautification, and Quality of Life.** Leadership teams for each of these areas have defined achievable goals that will begin addressing these concerns, and have developed strategies to reach those goals.

The benefits to the area that can be reaped from the successful implementation of this plan are many. The economic impact alone will likely be among the highest our region

has ever experienced, and the overall attractiveness of this area to additional business and industry will be significantly enhanced. Economist and ULM professor of economics Bob Eisenstadt observed in May of 2015, "The multiplier effect of having a Fortune 500 headquarters in a city like Monroe really can't be overstated. It's massive." Eisenstadt serves as director of the University of Louisiana at Monroe's Center for Business and Economic Research.

An equally important benefit will be the renewed "pride of place" that will come about as the result of coordinated beautification and quality of life efforts. By successfully engaging the public in these efforts, citizens will take ownership of the area and experience the satisfaction of living in a more vibrant community.

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The ultimate success of this plan will depend on four key factors: **Cooperation, Communication, Compromise, and Coordination.** Although many cooperative ventures have been undertaken in the past, this marks the first time that such a comprehensive approach that moves beyond traditional boundaries has been attempted. Today's leaders have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, to fully unite for a common beneficial cause, and to make the kind of substantive difference in this community that will be remembered and appreciated long after they are gone.

The future is now.

## ***Background/Justification For Proposal***

### ***Business Expansion Stimulates Growth in Our Area***

CenturyLink has had an ever-increasing sphere of influence in this region for nearly 90 years. It is the only Fortune 500 company with its corporate headquarters based in Louisiana, and is now the largest publicly traded company in the state. CenturyLink is a global communications, hosting, cloud, and IT services company. It provides broadband, voice, video, data, and managed services over a 250,000-route-mile U.S. fiber network and a 300,000-route-mile international transport network . It is not surprising that the success and resulting growth experienced by CenturyLink have been major driving forces for job creation here for years.

Clearly, our region is poised for growth and economic development on several fronts. Current and projected expansion in IT, Data, Healthcare, and Manufacturing related growth in our region, together with the impact of the University of Louisiana at Monroe and Delta Community College within the region as core economic drivers, are directly stimulating the economy of Ouachita Parish.

Medium and small companies are also experiencing the “trickle-down” effect of this growth. As a result of the diverse nature of new employees in our community, specialty stores and businesses are being developed. For example, the Kosher Food Store has recently been opened that is likely a response to this new population. There are several instances where spouses of these new employees are investing in new small businesses, as well. Finally, we also cannot rule out the anticipated increase in construction, service, and related jobs that will develop quickly due to the increase in housing and business construction.

*Within the past several years, it has become increasingly apparent that success and growth opportunities will not be limited to just this one company. Medium and small companies are also experiencing the “trickle-down” effect of this growth.*

### ***IBM Presence in Ouachita Parish***

In February 2015, corporate giant IBM announced that it would increase its presence in Louisiana. Having based its Technology Services Center in Baton Rouge two years earlier, IBM announced plans to build its IBM Applications Development and Innovation Center in Monroe, Louisiana, in partnership with CenturyLink as part of IBM’s ten-year commitment to Louisiana. This Center will create an estimated 400 new jobs to the area. To fill these jobs, IBM is aggressively recruiting employees from all over the world.

According to Robert McBay, Vice President IBM, the new Center will be located across Hwy 165N from CenturyLink corporate headquarters. This 100,000 square foot building will serve as the anchor for Century Village, a “corporate concept” residential, recreational, and business development that will be located on 88 acres. There will be a variety of housing options, entertainment venues, and shopping areas located within this complex.

### *CenturyLink's Technology Center of Excellence*

In March 2015, CenturyLink officially opened the CenturyLink Technology Center of Excellence in Monroe, a facility that will also attract highly skilled employees from across the world to our area. A conservative estimate is that this Center, together with its advanced research and development capabilities, will mean an influx of between 300 to 400 new employees within a very short period of time who will be moving to this area to live. This is in addition to those being recruited by IBM as well as a larger number of vendors and outside contractors.

### *Unprecedented Community Growth Brings Challenges and Competition*

Combined with already active recruiting being done by Vantage Health Plan, Inc., Chase Document Services, Ernst and Young, and KMPG, among others, clearly there will be strains on the existing resources within the area. These shortfalls must be addressed, and addressed quickly.

CenturyLink and IBM together with other companies in Louisiana and beyond

*The community that best addresses both the perceived and actual needs of these potential employees --- and does so quickly --- will likely get their commitment to come live and work within that community. Their presence will spur the economy and enhance the vitality of both the community in which they settle and the surrounding region.*

are recruiting from the same pool of potential employees with similar skill sets. The Cyber Innovation Center located in Bossier City as well as numerous technological, accounting, and healthcare firms throughout the state and the region are actively seeking the same talent. College graduates from universities in Louisiana now have their choice of good employment opportunities in Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, Lafayette, New Orleans, and Monroe.

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commitment to come live and work within that community. Their presence will spur the economy and enhance the vitality of both the community in which they settle and the surrounding region.

### *Retention: Key to Long Term Community Growth*

Just as important as successfully recruiting these new citizens to the area is the need to retain them once they and their families have relocated here. Retention of these employees and their families is dependent on our ability to remain fluid in our approach to the long term. To be successful, our retention strategy must continually evolve to meet the changing needs of our workforce both in the workplace and in the

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greater community. If we do not have a plan that addresses the long term changes necessary to make them want to settle permanently here, we will not realize the true potential of their being in our workforce and becoming an integral part of building our community.

### *Building a Coalition for Progress in Ouachita Parish Requires a Plan*

Clearly there is an urgent need for a strategic plan to address this unprecedented community growth. The keys to the success of this plan will be equally unprecedented. Community government, business, and civic leaders must come together to build a coalition for progress. To do this, they must cooperate beyond traditional “turf” boundaries, communicate together more openly in ways not done before, compromise whenever necessary to accomplish goals, and coordinate their individual efforts to create a much more comprehensive effort for the greater good of all.

Simply put, this community must transform itself to reflect its status as a Fortune 500 community. With everyone working together, much can be accomplished. If the proposed coalition succeeds, their work will ultimately lift the greater community as a whole, not just the area geographically near the CenturyLink campus, or within the city limits of the three municipalities, or even within the confines of Ouachita Parish.

The entire area finds itself for the first time in a very long time not having to look to the future, just hoping for opportunities like this one to come along. The future is now. The time to act is now.

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## ***Addressing the Current Need/Problem***

### *Developing a Proactive Plan for Progress*

To address the need for a strategic plan that government, business, and civic entities could adopt and work toward together, in May 2014, CenturyLink’s Public Policy area began a series of exploratory meetings with leaders in Monroe, West Monroe, and Ouachita Parish. In these meetings, the company briefed the leaders on the projected impacts that over 1200 new jobs being created by CenturyLink and IBM within the next twenty four months in the Greater Ouachita region would have on a number of resources including education, housing, infrastructure, beautification, and quality of life offerings. In return, the company sought guidance regarding a strategic plan to address these impacts. While no comprehensive plan was available, there was agreement that if a strategic plan were to be developed, the business community would be willing to participate wherever and however feasible.

### *Long Range Planning Committee Established*

In November 2014, CenturyLink representatives invited a small group of business leaders to begin discussing how such a strategic plan might be developed that would address parish-wide community development issues and meet the rapidly growing needs of CenturyLink, IBM, and other large corporations as they bring in new employees and their families to live and work in this area.

Forming the initial long range planning group were John Jones, Senior Vice President of Public Policy, Carrick B. Inabnett, Vice President Economic Development, CenturyLink; George Cummings, President and CEO of Progressive Bank and Progressive Bancorp, Inc.; David Hampton, Executive Vice President and COO of Progressive Bank; Joe Holyfield, Owner and CEO of Holyfield Construction,

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Inc.; Walt Caldwell, attorney, Ouachita Parish Police Juror for District C and Ouachita Counsel of Governments; Mike Thompson, CenturyLink Economic Development Consultant; and Joey Bales, CenturyLink Public Policy Manager.

Gradually this group grew in number, and the long range planning committee was established. Members represented all compass points within Ouachita Parish and brought to the discussion decades of experience working for, and dedication to, the betterment of the region. Included in this larger group were James Moore, business executive, hotel owner and developer; Nick Bruno, President of the University of Louisiana at Monroe; Janet Durden, President of the United Way of Northeast Louisiana; Sue Nicholson, President and CEO of the Monroe Chamber of Commerce; Courtney Hornsby, President of the West Monroe-West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce; Michael Echols, Director of Business Development Vantage Health Plan and Affinity Health Group; Carol Young, Senior Vice President for Monroe operations, Chase Document Services; Kelsea McCrary, President of the Downtown Arts Alliance and CenturyLink Talent Acquisitions/Recruitment Marketing; Liz Pierre, NLEP Senior Vice President Legal Research; Darian Atkins, Louisiana Delta Community College Director Public Relations/Marketing; and Millie Atkins, CenturyLink Public Policy Manager.

### *Identifying Areas of Concern for Recruits*

From the outset, the group met weekly over a six-month period, working to devise a plan that would first identify the immediate, actionable needs and then propose actions to address those needs. The group sought input from a variety of sources as it worked to prioritize known shortcomings of the area, while also reviewing the expectations of potential recruits.

Providing critical data on the recruits' expectations was Scott Trezise, Executive Vice

*Potential employees were concerned about education for their children and themselves, housing (both rental and property for purchase), healthcare quality and availability, safety, beautification and pride in the community, recreational and entertainment venues, and diversity issues including race and gender.*



President Human Resources for CenturyLink. Trezise and his staff had been actively seeking feedback from both recruits who accepted positions in the area as well as those who turned positions down in favor of another location. From his research, the group was able to learn that potential employees were concerned about education for their children and themselves, housing (both rental and property for purchase), healthcare quality and availability, safety, beautification and pride in the community, recreational and entertainment venues, and diversity issues including race and gender.

*These “Millennials” are high-tech users who are concerned about the environment, good health, cultural enrichment, and the need for a safe, secure community in which to live and rear their families.*

Trezise also told the group that the average recruits are in their 30's. These “Millennials” are high-tech users who are concerned about the environment, good health, cultural enrichment, and the need for a safe, secure community in which to live and rear their families.

Using this information as well as that gleaned from a variety of other sources, the group was able to identify five major areas of concern that must be addressed immediately. These core concerns and opportunities for improvement were created using a variety of issues that were then combined into five areas.

Leadership teams were assigned to each of the five areas. Their initial charge was to develop clear and concise mission statements so that the scope of their work would be properly defined.

## *Core Issues, Leadership Teams, and Mission Statements*

### **Core Issue 1: Education**

**Leadership Team:** Dr. Nick Bruno, Chair; Janet Durden, Co-Chair; Dr. Don Coker, Dr. Barbara Hanson, Courtney Hornsby, Carrick Inabnett, John Jones, Scott Martinez, Sue Nicholson, Lance Turner, Dr. Brent Vidrine, and Dr. Bob Webber.

***Mission: To engage all stakeholders in building educational pathways, PK-16, who provide students the opportunity to achieve their potential in their chosen career/degree. By this action, the communities of Monroe, West Monroe, Sterlington, and Ouachita Parish commit to building and cultivating an environment that will sustain economic growth and development by building, attracting and retaining a world-class workforce in this region.***

### **Core Issue 2: Housing**

**Leadership Team:** Joe Holyfield, Chair; John Rea, Co-Chair, James Moore, Carol Young, Carrick Inabnett, Lance Turner, Robert Daigle, Joey Bales, Tom Sanders, and Gretchen Kovac.

***Mission:*** *To identify the housing needs, as defined by the current and projected job growth in our community, to ensure there is sufficient, quality and affordable housing to meet on-going demand.*

### **Core Issue 3: Infrastructure**

**Leadership Team:** Sue Nicholson, Chair; David Hampton, Co-Chair; Walt Caldwell, George Cummings, Michael Echols, Carrick Inabnett, Joey Bales, and Mike Thompson

***Mission:*** *To build new and improve upon existing roadways (and their ancillary structures like traffic lights), such that citizens can easily and comfortably traverse the area.*

### **Core Issue 4: Beautification:**

**Leadership Team:** Joe Holyfield, Chair; Pat Moore, Co-Chair; John Rea, Carrick Inabnett, Joey Bales, Marshall Hill, Tommy Smith, James Moore, Carol Young, and *Extraordinary Ouachita*

***Mission:*** *To make changes in the area's landscape so that corporate citizens considering moving to Monroe, and those already located here, will view the aesthetics of the area as a positive reason for moving and living here. Where necessary, recommend changes in laws and ordinances to bring uniformity and accountability. Use beautification, recycling, and litter control as means to reinvigorate a sense of "pride of place" within the area.*

### **Core Issue 5: Quality of Life:**

**Leadership Team:** Michael Echols, Chair; Courtney Hornsby, Co-Chair; Walt Caldwell, Carrick Inabnett, Janet Durden, Carol Young, John Jones, Mike Thompson, Jerry Jones D.A., Denise Calhoun, Kelsea McCrary, Alana Cooper, and Millie Atkins.

***Mission:*** *To enhance the lives of citizens in Northeast Louisiana through quality of life opportunities such as art, entertainment, public safety, and outdoor activities.*

## ***Objectives and Scope of Work***

To research these core issues in depth, working subcommittees were created adding members who had specific information and/or skills considered essential to fully addressing each issue.

As the Leadership Teams with their various subcommittees met over a six-month period, certain critical needs became apparent and actions to address them were identified where possible. These were reported to the long range planning committee where additional input was gathered. In every instance, both the urgency of the need and the feasibility of the solution were taken into consideration.

## **Education Leadership Team Determinations:**

### **Goals:**

1. To enhance and supplement the visibility and awareness of the academic programs of excellence in Monroe City and Ouachita Parish School Districts.
2. To enhance and supplement the visibility and awareness of academic and non-academic extracurricular activities in Monroe City and Ouachita Parish School Districts (athletic and non-athletic).
3. To broaden the knowledge, accessibility, and relationships among the community's residents, businesses, organizations, LA Delta Community College, and the University of Louisiana at Monroe.
4. To identify and support educational initiatives that align with the career and professional workforce needs of Ouachita Parish.
5. To broaden and expand elementary school summer learning opportunities.

All five of these goals point to the critical need to communicate and market more effectively the educational strengths and opportunities within this area. This communication and marketing deficit is a critical issue in terms of recruitment. In many instances, potential employees cited academic quality and non-athletic enrichment opportunities (particularly in the Middle School age group) as contributing factors to their decision whether or not to relocate to this area.

The team identified a number of outstanding academic programs that exist within the Monroe City School System and/or the Ouachita Parish School System about which relatively little is known beyond the schools in which they are housed. In addition, they found numerous extracurricular activities, both athletic and non-athletic, that provide students opportunities to participate in programs that enhance the learning experience. Their research also noted a lack of coordination at times among various education programs and groups that are all working on some aspect of workforce development that will address specific, immediate business and community needs.

### **Recommended Actions to Address Education Issues:**

1. *Develop a Comprehensive Marketing Plan for Education*  
Through a cooperative working partnership between business and education, a comprehensive marketing plan will be developed to showcase academic and extra-curricular achievements. The target market will be determined in large part by the market research on-going at CenturyLink and other entities recruiting to this area.

This plan will include the following:

Website: Develop a one-click destination for all information relating to education within Ouachita Parish. Once at this site, the visitor will

find not only general information plus the latest news concerning education in the area, but also will find links to specific schools and programs that would attract recruits and future students, as well as links to enrichment opportunities (academic and non-academic; athletic and non-athletic) available to students.

Media Presence: Sharpen the focus on media awareness of outstanding achievements both academically and in non-academic areas. Develop strategies for promoting positive stories for all media outlets, with special attention to social media opportunities and web searches.

Public Outreach: Identify novel strategies to underscore the link between the existence of quality educational institutions in the area and the aesthetic benefits derived from their presence. Cultural experiences ranging from access to the performing and visual arts to attending athletic competitions are made possible in large part because of the educational institutions that support them.

## 2. *Develop an Efficient Plan for Coordinating Workforce Development Programs*

Through a cooperative effort involving both business and education, develop a plan that will enhance and expand coordination of workforce training/specialized skill training in the area. STEM education will address business and community workforce needs both immediate and long term. This plan will be developed with input from NLEP, NELEA, the Monroe and West Monroe-West Ouachita Chambers of Commerce, the University of Louisiana at Monroe, and Louisiana Delta Community College.

This plan will include the following:

Coordinated Website Presence: Specialized training available within Ouachita Parish for growing the area's workforce will be coordinated and communicated using the web and social media.

Better Coordination Among Company Human Resources Directors and Training Providers: An enhanced communications model between workforce training/specialized skills training providers will be put in place so that businesses can quickly access the training that they need.

## **Housing Leadership Team Determinations:**

### **Goals:**

1. To address the major needs of new recruits relocating to Ouachita Parish.
2. To determine the major housing development needs.

3. To communicate need and urgency to Northeast Louisiana Home Builders Association and developers.
4. To update company Human Resource divisions as new developments begin.

The team learned that the major housing concerns of new recruits relocating to Ouachita parish were a desire for quality, multi-family housing; new, well-planned residential developments; housing centrally located to their employment; new, affordable single family homes to transition into from rental that are located in strong performing school zones; and reasonable re-sale values.

*Critical to the successful integration of the new recruits into the area will be the inclusion of real estate offerings as part of a national marketing strategy for the area.*

Housing development needs within the parish were identified as new affordable and quality apartment complexes with amenities; new duplexes; developments located in strong performing school zones; and new homes in the \$150k-\$225k range. This area needs an additional 100 duplexes/townhouses in place by 2019, as well as 400 more Class A apartment units by that date.

Critical to the successful integration of the new recruits into the area will be the inclusion of real estate offerings as part of a national marketing strategy for the area.

Special attention must also be paid to the anti-crime and pro-safety components both in new developments and in the refurbishing of established properties. Because many of the recruits have expressed interest in living both in the Garden District and in the downtown area of Monroe, and because

many will be working in facilities located in the downtown area, this is particularly critical. Excellent lighting together with a visible police presence will go far to allay concerns. This is clearly an overlapping issue that involves both Quality of Life and Housing.

### **Recommended Actions to Address Housing Issues:**

1. Meet with the Northeast Louisiana Home Builders Association and brief them on the opportunity and the crisis. During the briefing, special attention will be paid to the research from prospective recruits concerning what they will be looking for in housing in the community.
2. Communicate with both single-family residential developers and multi-family residential developers and brief them on the opportunity and the crisis. Emphasize the need for “Millennial” needs such as bike paths, excellent lighting, dog parks, exercise facilities, etc. within the developments.
3. Report all new developments within Ouachita Parish immediately to company Human Resource divisions so that they can continually update their information and adjust their recruitment strategies accordingly.

## **Infrastructure Leadership Team Determinations:**

### **Goals:**

1. To determine the water and sewage rehabilitation and repair needed within the municipalities to upgrade and modernize aging sewer and water system infrastructure and to provide additional capacity. To develop a parish-wide water and sewage system that supports new housing development projects and to seek priority funding from the appropriate governmental bodies to build it.
2. To determine the best and most effective infrastructure needed to provide adequate drainage and flood control for south Monroe and Ouachita Parish, and to seek priority funding from the appropriate governmental bodies to address this issue.
3. To complete the Kansas Lane Extension and Highway 165 Business Connector through right-of-way acquisition and secure final funding for construction which will connect U.S. Hwy 80 and U.S. Highway 165 North. To support the completion of the Kansas Lane Garrett Road overpass to improve the I-20 interchange at Garrett road. To support a South Garrett Road/Ticheli Road Extension connecting I-20 to U.S. Highway 165 South, creating an inner loop in Monroe. *[Note: Funding for the Kansas Lane Extension project was secured during the 2015 Legislative Session in June. Construction is expected to begin in 2017. Funding for this project came about through the coordinated, combined efforts of the Monroe Chamber of Commerce, business leaders, and our elected representatives working together for the common good.]*
4. To support the Ouachita Parish Police Jury in developing a plan to support long term funding for infrastructure and maintenance of Ouachita Parish roads. *[Note: This is much like similar efforts already in place in Monroe and West Monroe.]*
5. To secure funding and complete the widening of U.S. Highway 80 from Well Road west; widening of Millhaven Road from Garrett Road to Louisiana Delta Community College; and for the improvement, redesign, and enhanced image of Winnsboro Road.
6. To develop a long-term solution to reduce congestion on U.S. 165 north and south and east and west of the Lea Joyner Bridge.
7. To complete Phase II and III of the Finks Hideaway Road Project.
8. To support the establishment of Amtrak passenger service in Monroe/West Monroe. *[See Quality of Life section]*

### **Recommended Actions to Address Infrastructure Issues:**

1. Work closely with the Housing Leadership Team to determine the water and sewage infrastructure priorities needed to support current and future growth in Ouachita Parish and to secure the necessary funding to build that infrastructure.

2. To encourage the municipalities and Parish government to develop a communication plan to inform the public about the Monroe Metropolitan Transportation Plan and to encourage input from the business community in developing updates to that plan to better identify critical needs and anticipated growth demands on infrastructure systems.
3. To encourage the municipalities and Parish government to develop a communication plan to inform the public about the ongoing maintenance plan for parish and city infrastructure systems.
4. To create more open communication channels among the various groups and agencies so that more comprehensive solutions can be developed and coordinated funding secured for long-range infrastructure solutions for the entire parish.

### **Beautification Leadership Team Determinations:**

#### **Goals:**

1. To restore a community-wide sense of “pride of place” to the area that will engage the public and encourage their participation.
2. To engage individual businesses in a proactive campaign to enhance their curb appeal through landscaping and maintenance of green spaces (including lawn, planting beds, and trees) and hardscapes (parking lots, sidewalks, fencing, etc.).
3. To coordinate grass mowing, weed eating, and litter removal activities wherever feasible along the highways, public byways, and adjacent fencing that will result in a uniformly clean, “kept” and “cared for” appearance.
4. To work with appropriate municipal offices to develop a more efficient way of dealing with citizens who do not maintain their residential or business property. *[Note: This is a priority for residents as expressed during a Southside Monroe community focus group. Code enforcement and the elimination of substandard housing were key issues.]*
5. To bring municipal ordinances concerning litter and property into uniformity with one another so that enforcement will be clear and immediate.

### **Recommended Actions to Address Beautification Issues:**

1. Identify the various public and private anti-litter efforts already underway within the parish, and use those as building blocks for a focused anti-litter campaign to raise public awareness.
2. Engage church leaders in the area, beginning with the Community Prayer Partners, and brief them on the need. Ask them to work with their congregations to encourage participation in anti-litter and beautification efforts.

3. Meet with representatives from civic groups within the area to apprise them of the need for an immediate, sustained beautification effort to support recruitment and retention. The Junior League of Monroe, the garden clubs (with special emphasis on the Monroe Garden Club which is the largest in Louisiana with over 350 active members), plus the various Rotary, Lions, and similar clubs will be asked for their assistance in funding where appropriate, and particularly in the case of the garden clubs, in selecting and maintaining appropriate plantings suitable for the conditions at the locations identified.
4. Support a “Good Job!” campaign through the media to showcase beautification projects undertaken through this initiative.

### **Quality of Life Leadership Team Determinations:**

#### **Goals:**

1. To develop and implement with regional partners a formal branding campaign which will address both internal and external audiences emphasizing the benefits of growing a family and/or business in the region.
2. To continue to redevelop and repurpose our municipal downtowns.
3. To enhance the area’s recreational Quality of Life opportunities by developing a multi-use sporting facility in the region with family-focused activities and a variety of sporting opportunities.
4. To cooperate with officials to develop the airport as an information gateway --- a center for arriving visitors that will give them a “first impression” of the Quality of Life opportunities awaiting them here.
5. To continue working closely with city and parish law enforcement to identify both residential and business districts that will require a more visible police presence to reassure both newcomers and established residents.
6. To increase awareness of the visual and performing arts in our region, with a focus on informing and inviting the community to learn about, interact with, and appreciate our galleries, museums, events, and art forms by connecting our arts organizations and allowing for collaboration and communication.

### **Recommended Actions to Address Quality of Life Issues:**

1. The Quality of Life Leadership Team will collaborate with NLEP to assist in developing the branding strategy. Once a draft strategy is in place, the team will bring the plan back to the business community for review.
2. Working in cooperation with the City of West Monroe, develop a master planting plan for the two downtowns. In Monroe there will be a focus on the area on



Walnut around the tracks and extending to the River Market and DeSiard. In West Monroe, the focus will be along Trenton Street.

3. A Culture District Coordinator will be hired to work cooperatively with both Monroe and West Monroe Cultural Districts on redevelopment areas and Quality of Life activities. Monroe Renaissance will provide office space downtown and the utilities to facilitate this. \$50k plus will have to be raised annually for 3 years to support this effort.

4. In collaboration with others in the community working to assist the homeless and those in need of special services (including workforce, community services, or other needs), develop a Community Service Center as a one stop for multiple lines of services that are presently being deployed in various locations that create impediments to those seeking to use them. This project will include identification of the appropriate, accessible site as well as securing funding along with collaboration among dozens of organizations.

5. Support the Housing Leadership Team by working with developers and banking to develop additional housing options and after hours events in the downtown areas. Incorporate those into the overall branding campaign and national marketing campaign.

6. Get State and local commitment, develop a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, identify the site, and work with the Convention and Visitors Bureau to locate a hotel option downtowns.

7. Communicate the diversity of this area through display and digital marketing at the Monroe Airport. Areas of diversity that will be showcased include

- a) the business community,
- b) the people living and working here,
- c) the places to see and things to do in the community, and
- d) the culture through the Arts and entertainment sectors.

8. Secure special assistance from law enforcement officials and individual neighborhood alliances to create “safe zones” where our residents work and play. Working closely with the Infrastructure Leadership Team, secure extra lighting for key intersections, particularly those along pedestrian walkways used at night. Working closely with the Beautification Leadership Team, identify key intersections that need to be enhanced visually to make the area more desirable.

9. Using the master downtown plan for both Monroe and West Monroe, the Culture District Coordinator and the collaborative branding strategy for NLEP, the Quality of Life leadership team will support and bring awareness to the thriving arts scene in our region. With inclusion in the branding campaign, we will position Ouachita Parish as the creative hub of Northeast Louisiana, highlighting all that we offer as a creatively prolific community in many arts forms and mediums.

The Coordinator will focus on bringing live venues, new events, and new audiences to the downtowns and the Cultural District, increasing attendance to current art events and connecting the arts organizations to better utilize resources and time.

The Coordinator will also introduce new and existing residents to the area to the arts and culture landscape of our parish and the surrounding area working closely with business and city leaders.

In addition, we will work with State and local officials to create an Amtrak stop in the historic downtown depot. This will position the city as a destination location on the Mississippi to Texas Amtrak line along the I-20 Corridor.

### ***Benefits from Project***

The biggest “win” will come if this plan is adopted and we work together constructively to recruit and retain these invaluable people to our workforce and our community. The economic impact will likely be among the highest our region has experienced in decades, and the overall attractiveness of this area to business and industry will be significantly enhanced.

An unexpected benefit will likely be an enhanced awareness within the region of assets that reflect the diversity of the greater community. These assets, often only well known to those individuals who have specific interests reflected there, should be marketed more aggressively. Certainly having the Poverty Point UNESCO World Heritage Site less than an hour away is a remarkable attraction. The G. B. Cooley House, the Masur Museum of Art, the Northeast Louisiana Delta African American Heritage Museum, the Chennault Aviation and Military Museum, the Biedenharn Museum and Gardens, the ULM Museum of Natural History, the Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge, the Liew Family International Student Center at ULM, the Monroe Symphony, the Twin City Ballet Company, Louisiana Delta Ballet Company, ULM’s School of Visual and Performing Arts, the Northeast Louisiana Children’s Museum, Art Alley, Antique Alley, and extensive parks and recreation --- all of these offer cultural enrichment opportunities to newcomers as well as the general population. They are among the region’s “best kept secrets” that should be emphasized.

Perhaps more importantly, adoption of this plan will signal a new approach to meeting challenges for our area --- one that places an emphasis on prioritization and focuses our collective influence and energy (both private and public/business and government) toward specific needs. Although there have been countless cooperative ventures undertaken in the past, this will mark the first time that such a comprehensive approach that sees beyond traditional boundaries has been tried. If it succeeds, everyone will benefit in the many ways.

*Adoption of this plan will signal a new approach to meeting challenges for our area --- one that places an emphasis on prioritization and focuses our collective influence and energy (both private and public/business and government) toward specific needs.*

There are four keys to the ultimate success of this undertaking:

1. *Cooperation*

Through cooperation among these groups, much more will be accomplished than might be were they working alone. An inter-government council should help identify and expedite future projects. With the business community engaged with both the public and private sectors in projects for the common good, stakeholders in all parts of the parish should receive a better value.

2. *Communication*

Open and free-flowing communication among these groups should lessen the likelihood for misunderstanding, and no group or section should be --- or feel --- left out of the process.

3. *Compromise*

With a cooperative spirit and open communication, compromise should be much easier to reach on points that require it. The trust among the groups that should naturally develop as the working partnership develops will likely enhance the overall process.

4. *Coordination*

By coordinating efforts, the groups and government bodies will be able to get more for their work than they could get working as individuals. Unnecessary duplication should be reduced significantly, and a more unified community at large with common goals should emerge.

## ***Financials***

A key consideration of the group was to propose projects and outcomes that were truly actionable and not so costly or complex that they could not be achieved quickly. That said, the group acknowledges that some of their proposals will require some moderate financial support.

Just as a new mindset of cooperation is required among the major stakeholders, so too must a new mindset be developed regarding public-private partnerships to achieve critical outcomes. More discussion is planned to address this issue as many of the recommendations move toward implementation.

## ***Appendix***

### **Figure 1 – List of Contributors**

#### **Long Range Planning Committee:**

John Jones, Senior Vice President of Public Policy  
Carrick B. Inabnett, Vice President Economic Development, CenturyLink;  
George Cummings, President and CEO of Progressive Bank and Progressive Bancorp, Inc.;  
David Hampton, Executive Vice President and COO of Progressive Bank;  
Joe Holyfield, Owner and CEO of Holyfield Construction, Inc.  
Walt Caldwell, attorney, Ouachita Parish Police Juror for District C and Ouachita Counsel of Governments  
Mike Thompson, CenturyLink Economic Development Consultant  
Joey Bales, CenturyLink Public Policy Manager  
James Moore, Business Executive, hotel owner and developer  
Nick Bruno, President of the University of Louisiana at Monroe  
Janet Durden, President of the United Way of Northeast Louisiana  
Sue Nicholson, President and CEO of the Monroe Chamber of Commerce  
Courtney Hornsby, President of the West Monroe-West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce  
Michael Echols, Director of Business Development Vantage Health Plan and Affinity Health Group  
Carol Young, Senior Vice President for Monroe operations, Chase Document Services  
Kelsea McCrary, President of the Downtown Arts Alliance and CenturyLink Talent Acquisitions/Recruitment Marketing  
Liz Pierre, NLEP Senior Vice President Legal Research  
Darian Atkins, Louisiana Delta Community College Director Public Relations/Marketing

Millie Atkins, CenturyLink Public Policy Manager

#### **Leadership Teams:**

##### **Education:**

Dr. Nick Bruno, Chair  
Janet Durden, Co-Chair  
Dr. Don Coker  
Dr. Barbara Hanson  
Courtney Hornsby  
Carrick Inabnett  
John Jones  
Scott Martinez  
Sue Nicholson  
Lance Turner  
Dr. Brent Vidrine  
Dr. Bob Webber

##### **Housing:**

Joe Holyfield, Chair  
John Rea, Co-Chair  
James Moore  
Carol Young  
Carrick Inabnett  
Lance Turner  
Robert Daigle  
Joey Bales  
Tom Sanders  
Gretchen Kovac

##### **Infrastructure:**

Sue Nicholson, Chair  
David Hampton, Co-Chair  
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George Cummings  
Michael Echols  
Carrick Inabnett  
Joey Bales  
Mike Thompson  
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Kim Golden, City Engineer, City of Monroe  
Robbie George, City Engineer City of West Monroe

**Infrastructure (continued)**

Doug Mitchell, Director of  
Transportation North Delta Regional  
Planning  
Marshall Hill, Regional Administrator  
Department of Transportation and  
Development Region 5  
Dwight Vines, Economic  
Development Officer, City of Monroe  
Lori Reneau, Vice President  
Government Affairs, Monroe  
Chamber of Commerce

**Beautification:**

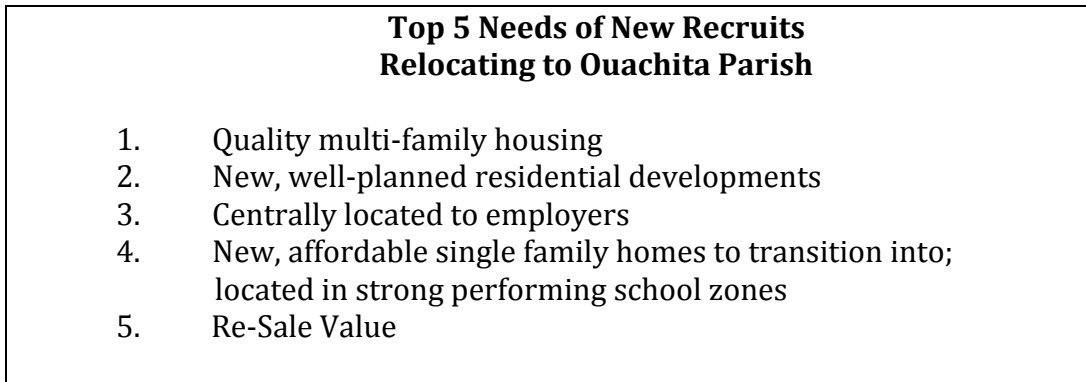
Joe Holyfield, Chair  
Pat Moore, Co-Chair  
John Rea  
Tommy Smith  
James Moore  
Carol Young  
Carrick Inabnett  
Joey Bales

Marshall Hill  
*Extraordinary Ouachita*

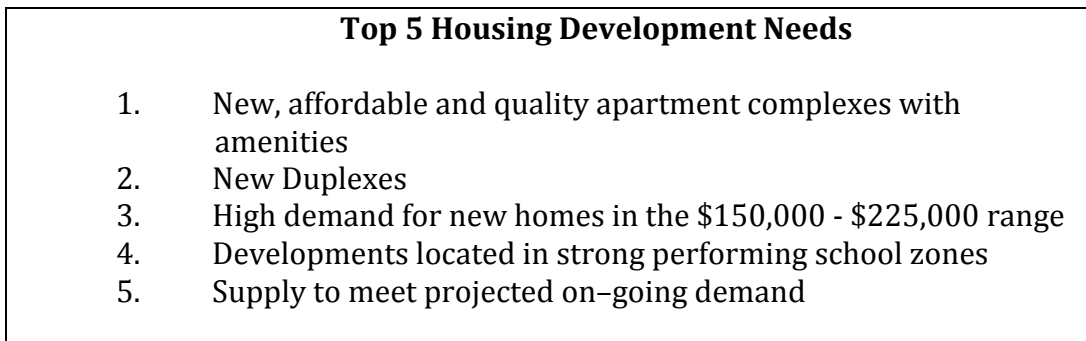
**Quality of Life:**

Michael Echols, Chair  
Courtney Hornsby, Co-Chair  
Walt Caldwell  
Carrick Inabnett  
Janet Durden  
Carol Young  
John Jones  
Mike Thompson  
Jerry Jones D.A.  
Denise Calhoun,  
Kelsea McCrary  
Alana Cooper  
Millie Atkins

**Figure 2 - Top 5 Needs of New Recruits relocating to Ouachita Parish**



**Figure 3 - Top 5 Housing Development Needs**



**Figure 4 - Residential Developments under construction and/or coming on line in 2015-2016**

<b>Residential Developments: Under construction and/or coming on line in 2015-2016</b>				
Location	SFH	Apts	Duplexes	Town Homes
Monroe	96	0	50	0
Parish	679	108	20	0
Sterlington	549	114	40	20
W. Monroe	8	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,332</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>20</b>

**Figure 5 - LED Press Release: IBM Announces 400-Job Application Development and Innovation Center In Monroe**



2.16.15

## **IBM Announces 400-Job Application Development And Innovation Center In Monroe**

*IBM technology facility will anchor 88-acre, CenturyLink-affiliated technology park and mixed-use development; with State of Louisiana support, local universities will dramatically expand technology-focused offerings*

MONROE, La. — Today, Gov. Bobby Jindal and IBM Senior Vice President Colleen Arnold joined CenturyLink CEO and President Glen Post, Louisiana Economic Development Secretary Stephen Moret and other officials to announce that IBM will establish a 400-job Application

Development and Innovation Center in Monroe, from which the company will provide software technology services to clients across the United States. IBM also will partner with CenturyLink on research, development and product innovation initiatives.

The IBM center in Monroe represents a multifaceted, transformational partnership that will include expanded higher-education programs related to computer science, as well as a major new technology park and mixed-use, real estate development that will catalyze new economic growth opportunities in Monroe. The IBM center will employ a broad range of college graduates and experienced professionals with backgrounds in computer science and other quantitative-intense fields, such as engineering, mathematics and science. In addition to the 400 direct jobs that will be created at the center, LED estimates the project will result in approximately 406 new indirect jobs, for a total of more than 800 new permanent jobs in Northeast Louisiana.

The rapid and widespread adoption of mobile and social technologies over recent years has changed the way customers and companies interact with one another – driving fundamental transformations to business processes and applications. The center will provide IBM’s clients with services that address the increasing demand for flexible software services to keep up with the big data, cloud computing and mobile requirements that they are facing.

Gov. Jindal said, “Two of the most successful economic development projects we’ve embarked upon in recent years are the multiple corporate headquarters expansion projects by CenturyLink in Monroe and the innovative public-private partnerships that created IBM’s technology center in downtown Baton Rouge.

This project replicates those successes by combining two of the leading technology companies in the world in a partnership that will pay great dividends for the community and the economic future of Monroe, the Northeast Region and our entire state. This innovative partnership represents a big win that will bring about more business opportunities for generations to come. In addition to CenturyLink’s expansion, this project represents one of the most significant economic development announcements in Northeast Louisiana in decades.”

Following CenturyLink’s acquisitions of Embarq (2008), Qwest (2010) and Savvis (2011), CenturyLink and LED have been cultivating a shared vision to attract some of CenturyLink’s top technology partners to Monroe in order to better support CenturyLink’s growth, as well as to magnify the economic impact of its Fortune 500 headquarters in Northeast Louisiana. The IBM center will provide hundreds of new jobs for college graduates in north Louisiana in addition to new professional career options for spouses of professionals whom CenturyLink recruits to Monroe.

As part of the project, the State of Louisiana will provide \$4.5 million in funding over 10 years for expanded higher-education programs designed primarily to increase the number of annual computer science graduates in Northeast Louisiana. The University of Louisiana at Monroe will expand its computer science and computer information systems programs while Louisiana Tech and Grambling State University will expand their technology programs in related areas, such as cyber engineering and data analytics.

Additionally, IBM will work closely with local professors to recommend curricular innovations focused on technology, math and software development, and equip students to meet the growing demand for business services, including advanced analytics, process innovation and application development.

The IBM center in Monroe will anchor a new 88-acre, mixed-use development employing smart-growth principles and will include a complementary mix of residential, commercial and recreational uses. The new development will be located along U.S. Highway 165 directly across

from CenturyLink's corporate headquarters. Following a competitive selection process, CenturyLink chose developer Robert Daigle, who built the successful River Ranch traditional neighborhood development near Lafayette, to guide development of the master-planned community. The mixed-use development will be located on land owned by CenturyLink that currently is undeveloped.

The State of Louisiana will provide \$12 million for construction of new office space for use by IBM, which will become an anchor tenant of the privately developed mixed-use complex. A University of Louisiana at Monroe foundation will own the IBM space and lease that space to the company.

The announcement of IBM's new center in Monroe accompanies the completion later this year of IBM's new technology center in downtown Baton Rouge, which will employ 800 people. LSU is expanding its computer science program as part of the IBM-Baton Rouge project and already has experienced a doubling of its computer science enrollment since that project was announced in March 2013. This economic development win joins four other announcements secured by the Jindal Administration since 2008 that today have become four of the Top 10 manufacturers in Northeast Louisiana. These projects include ConAgra Foods Lamb Weston, DG Foods, Foster Farms and Gardner Denver.

"We're proud to be part of this innovative public-private partnership with the State of Louisiana and CenturyLink to further develop highly valued skills and solutions expertise in security, analytics and mobility applications," said Arnold, senior vice president, IBM Sales and Distribution. "Louisiana is the right place for high-tech job growth with an exceptional education system, business environment and workforce to serve the needs of our clients."

IBM's Application Development and Innovation Center in Monroe will follow the impending completion of CenturyLink's new 300,000-square-foot Technology Center of Excellence, which expands the Monroe company's headquarters space by 82 percent while adding an innovation hub for 800 new employees. That facility, which will open next month, fulfills a major part of two corporate headquarters and retention projects announced with the State of Louisiana in 2009 and 2011 that will create a total of 1,150 new direct jobs at CenturyLink and boost the company's total Monroe-area employment to 2,600.

"CenturyLink's partnership with IBM aligns our Information Technology investments with our strategic growth initiatives," Post said. "It also supports our companywide transformation to an Internet Protocol, or IP-based, infrastructure, which enables a more agile IT development environment across CenturyLink. In addition, this initiative supports CenturyLink's commitment to bring technology-based jobs to Louisiana and improve our workforce development and education climate. We appreciate our partnership with IBM and are glad we've been able to be a catalyst for their expansion plans in Monroe."

LED, IBM and CenturyLink began formal discussions about the potential project in October 2014. To secure the project, LED offered IBM a customized, performance-based incentive package that includes \$7.7 million in grants to reimburse relocation, recruitment, training and operating costs of the Monroe center. In addition, IBM will receive the comprehensive workforce solutions of LED FastStart® – the nation's No. 1 state workforce training program – and the company is expected to utilize the state's Quality Jobs Program.

"These 400 jobs will be a huge boost to our local economy," Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo said. "We are 'Monroe Proud' to welcome IBM as our newest corporate citizen. This is another positive development due to the continued expansion of the CenturyLink headquarters here in Monroe. We thank Governor Jindal and LED officials for all of their efforts."



IBM and CenturyLink represent the vanguard of what has become a rapidly expanding technology sector in Louisiana.

Combined with other digital media and software development projects announced by CGI, CSC, EA, Gameloft, GE Capital and others, these companies are producing more than 5,000 new direct jobs expected to be filled in Louisiana's technology sector in the next few years alone.

"After several months of work with many partners, we are pleased that IBM has chosen Monroe for this exciting project," said President Scott Martinez of the North Louisiana Economic Partnership. "This will cement our community as a desirable location for industry leaders such as IBM."

For additional details about IBM's Monroe project, visit <http://ibmmonroejobs.com/>

### **Figure 6 – Article: “Monroe-Based Century-Link Is A Global Leader in Cloud Infrastructure”**

*EQ Q3 2014*

# **Monroe-Based CenturyLink Is A Global Leader In Cloud Infrastructure**

From its Monroe headquarters, CenturyLink stands as a leading provider of Internet, TV and voice services. The company is included on the Fortune 500 list of America's largest corporations, but it is not resting on its laurels. With a series of strategic acquisitions, CenturyLink emerged from a small Louisiana-based telephone company into the third-largest telecommunications company in the U.S. and it is a global leader in cloud infrastructure and hosted IT solutions for enterprise customers. CenturyLink not only maintains its momentum in its march to be the provider of choice, but it also remains apprised of the latest advancements in the industry. Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary Stacey Goff shares the company's innovation story:

**[Q]** How has CenturyLink evolved through the years?

**[A]** CenturyLink is one of the leading providers of data, voice and managed services in local, national and select international markets through its high-quality advanced fiber optic network and multiple data centers for businesses and consumers. The company also offers advanced entertainment services under the CenturyLink® Prism™ TV and DIRECTV brands.

CenturyLink was founded as the Oak Ridge Telephone Company in Oak Ridge, Louisiana, in the 1930s. Today, our company is publicly traded on the NYSE under the symbol CTL. Throughout our history, CenturyLink has grown through strategic acquisitions that allow us to expand our portfolio of service offerings and grow into more diverse markets.

In early 2015, we will open the 300,000-square-foot CenturyLink Technology Center Excellence which will include a technology research and development lab, a network operations center and collaborative office and meeting space. In the Center, employees with network technology and IT skills will work together to create innovative products and services for CenturyLink's customers.

**[Q]** Why did you pick Louisiana to develop your product/company/innovation?

**[A]** The state has continued to make it attractive for businesses to locate and expand in Louisiana, which is one of the key reasons we continue to invest and grow in Monroe. Louisiana is a great place to do business and there are numerous programs in place to assist businesses who want to locate or grow here.

**[Q]** What unexpected advantages did CenturyLink benefit from that could only be found in Louisiana?

**[A]** Louisiana offers a diverse and rich cultural experience from north to south. CenturyLink has found Northeast Louisiana particularly attractive to families, outdoor enthusiasts, and those seeking music and the arts. Monroe is home to the University of Louisiana at Monroe, and we also enjoy the benefits of nearby educational institutions such as Louisiana Tech University, Grambling State University and Delta Community College.

CenturyLink is anchoring a cyber economy in Louisiana on the eastern end of I-20. With Louisiana Tech, the Cyber Innovation Center and CSC on the western end of I-20, we are positioned to take advantage of this growing area of business and commerce.

**[Q]** How does CenturyLink impact the Louisiana economy?

**[A]** CenturyLink is the third largest telecommunications company in the U.S. and is recognized as a leader in the network services market by technology industry analyst firms. The company is a global leader in cloud infrastructure and hosted IT solutions for enterprise customers.

With roots in rural northeast Louisiana, CenturyLink is headquartered in Monroe, which has proven successful over the years as the company has grown. The company employs about 2,200 people in Monroe and will hire an additional 800 in the next few years.

As a result of CenturyLink's overall growth, some of our key vendors are also locating offices and employees in Monroe to be closer to us.

**[Q]** What is your company doing (from a product or service offering) that no other company is doing?

**[A]** Since 2009, CenturyLink has transformed our business into the company it is today. On July 1, 2009, CenturyTel acquired Embarq Corporation, creating one of the leading communications companies in the United States. Simultaneously, the company began operating under the name CenturyLink. This acquisition positioned the combined company as the largest independent telecommunications provider in the United States.

On April 1, 2011, CenturyLink acquired Qwest Communications, creating the third largest telecommunications provider – based on access lines – in the U.S.

On July 15, 2011, CenturyLink acquired Savvis, Inc. for \$3.2 billion. This acquisition allowed CenturyLink to achieve global scale as a managed hosting and cloud services provider, and accelerated our ability to deliver those capabilities to business customers.

In 2013, CenturyLink acquired AppFog, Inc. and Tier 3, Inc. to enhance our platform-as-a-service and infrastructure-as-a-service offerings. AppFog provided a reliable, scalable and fast platform for developing apps in the cloud, and Tier 3 provided a public, multi-tenant cloud platform and a related development roadmap.

**Figure 7 – CenturyLink Press Release: “Louisiana Gov. Jindal and CenturyLink CEO Glen Post announce corporate headquarters expansion”  
June 28, 2011**



# **Louisiana Gov. Jindal and CenturyLink CEO Glen Post announce corporate headquarters expansion**

**June 28, 2011**

**Louisiana Gov. Jindal and CenturyLink CEO Glen Post announce corporate headquarters expansion**

MONROE, La. — Today, Gov. Bobby Jindal and CenturyLink CEO and President Glen F. Post, III announced that the Fortune 500 company and the state have entered into an incentive agreement for CenturyLink to remain headquartered in Monroe, expand its headquarters and produce 800 new jobs in the state by 2016. These positions will be in addition to the 350-job expansion previously announced in late 2009, so by 2016 the incentive agreement calls for the company to have added nearly 1,150 new jobs in Northeast Louisiana beyond its employment level in mid-2009.

Louisiana Economic Development estimates that the nearly 800 new, direct jobs averaging more than \$65,000, plus benefits should result in the creation of approximately 1,170 indirect jobs, for a total impact of nearly 1,970 new jobs. Once the expansion as described in the incentive agreement is completed by 2016, LED estimates that CenturyLink will become the top economic-driver company in Northeast Louisiana and one of the top 10 economic-driver companies statewide, based on its direct and indirect employment impact.

Governor Jindal said, “Today’s announcement is a huge win for Monroe, Northeast Louisiana and our whole state. Today, we’re announcing a new partnership that will not only retain CenturyLink in Louisiana for the long term, but will also create more high-paying job opportunities for the people of Northeast Louisiana so they can find rewarding careers and pursue their dreams right here at home. CenturyLink truly is one of Louisiana’s great business success stories, and we are thrilled they will continue their growth right here in Louisiana.”

In July 2009, CenturyLink, which was called CenturyTel at the time, acquired Kansas-based EMBARQ to create an industry leading communications provider. Immediately

after the merger was announced, and to ensure that the headquarters remained in Louisiana, Gov. Jindal called for LED to engage company executives to develop a support plan to retain and grow CenturyLink employment in Louisiana. That effort resulted in a commitment by CenturyLink in November 2009 to maintain its headquarters in Monroe and to increase its Louisiana employment by 350 jobs.

Governor Jindal met with CenturyLink's Board of Directors and continued to work with the company even after they announced the acquisition of Denver-based Qwest Corp. in April 2010, which culminated in today's announcement of an incentive agreement calling for CenturyLink to add nearly 800 more jobs in Northeast Louisiana, including but not limited to relocated positions. A new cooperative endeavor agreement executed between CenturyLink and LED also will keep the company's headquarters in Louisiana through at least 2020.

Upon completing its Qwest merger in April, CenturyLink now operates a fiber network of 190,000 route-miles in 37 states. The combined company had \$18.5 billion in pro forma revenues in 2010. CenturyLink serves more than 5 million broadband customers and more than 15 million access lines across the U.S.

"We appreciate the state's efforts to support CenturyLink's growth during this pivotal time in our history," Post said. "As we move forward, we will continually evaluate our staffing needs to support our business, and we are pleased to remain headquartered in Louisiana. Our expectation is that our Northeast Louisiana-based workforce will grow over the next five years through job creation, voluntary employee turnover in locations outside Louisiana, employee-initiated moves to pursue career opportunities and, in some cases, business decisions to move jobs currently located elsewhere to Northeast Louisiana."

To secure the headquarters expansion agreement, LED negotiated a customized incentive package, including a performance-based grant of \$14.9 million to pay for 50 percent of building or leasing additional headquarters space in Monroe, as well as a performance-based grant of \$3.3 million to reimburse relocation costs. LED also will provide \$1.2 million over four years to expand CenturyLink's telecommunications partnership with Louisiana Tech University that initially was announced with the prior expansion in 2009. LED also will provide up to 150,000 square feet of discounted space in the state-owned Accent Building in Monroe through 2015, which will be utilized if needed as swing space for CenturyLink staff during construction of expanded headquarters facilities. CenturyLink also is expected to continue utilizing the Louisiana FastStart program, as well as LED's Quality Jobs program.

Prior to the 2009 announcement, CenturyLink had more than 1,820 jobs in Louisiana. Today, the company has about 1,970 employees in Louisiana. After completion of the expansions described in the incentive agreements announced in 2009 and today, CenturyLink's Louisiana employment will have increased by more than 60 percent to approximately 2,970 direct employees. LED estimates that the company's total employment impact following the expansion will be approximately 7,400 direct and indirect jobs in Louisiana.

Since early 2008, leading companies have announced moves of their headquarters or other significant operations to Louisiana from a wide variety of states, including California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin.

CenturyLink's stature as a provider of broadband communications, Internet Protocol TV, cloud computing and data hosting services cements Louisiana's growing presence in the digital media technology sector.

"As Louisiana places a greater emphasis on cultivating the digital interactive media industry, CenturyLink's growing portfolio of technology services really strengthens our state's position in that arena," said LED Secretary Stephen Moret. "We're convinced that digital media and software development will raise Louisiana's economic standing in a meaningful way and that CenturyLink will be a major player in that growth."

A key point of CenturyLink's Monroe expansion will be the Louisiana Tech partnership. Through the Clarke M. Williams Professorship in Telecommunications, the university will collaborate with CenturyLink to deliver courses that serve the advanced education needs of the company's workforce. A certificate program will build upon the prior education and training of the employees and provide them with skills needed for success in further professional and technical development.

**Figure 8 – Greg Hilburn Blog May 29, 2015: “CenturyLink transforms Monroe economy**

## CenturyLink transforms Monroe economy



[Greg Hilburn](#), [ghilburn@thenewsstar.com](mailto:ghilburn@thenewsstar.com) 1:37 p.m. CDT May 29, 2015

CenturyLink's growth in Monroe has done more than boost the economy. It's changed the very landscape of the market's economic foundation.

"I believe CenturyLink will transform the future of Monroe and northeastern Louisiana," Gov. Bobby Jindal said in a recent interview with The News-Star.

And it's not just the company's expansion, which in itself has been vast. CenturyLink, the largest public company headquartered in Louisiana, opened its new 300,000-square-foot Technology Center of Excellence this year, where more than 800 new employees will be housed.

But CenturyLink's impact is compounded by its ability to attract more technology companies and jobs to Monroe, including the most significant to date, an ongoing 400-job IBM expansion in Monroe.

IBM joins companies like KPMG, Amdocs and Huawei that have opened offices in Monroe during the past two years to serve CenturyLink.

"We're hoping our expansion will continue to drive other job growth in our own community," CenturyLink chief executive Glen Post has said.

"The multiplier effect of having a Fortune 500 headquarters in a city like Monroe really can't be overstated," said Bob Eisenstadt, director of the University of Louisiana at Monroe's Center for Business and Economic Research. "It's massive."

That massive impact has been recognized with the Thomas H. Scott Award of Excellence.

More than 800 new employees will eventually be housed in CenturyLink's Technology Center of Excellence.

And CenturyLink isn't just transforming the Monroe economy. Post believes the Technology Center of Excellence will be a hub for innovation throughout the industry.

"We're transforming the company from one that provides dial-tone telephone service to a company providing strategic network services and cloud hosting and IT services," Post said. "This building is a big part of that. I really believe this company will change the world of technology through work done here."

Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo said he remains in awe of the project and the company.

"I'm overwhelmed by the promise and potential this company and this center hold for the future of our city, our region and our state," Mayo said.

The Center of Excellence includes a technology research and development lab, a network operations center and collaborative office and meeting space.

CenturyLink already employs more than 2,000 workers at its headquarters with an annual local payroll exceeding \$100 million.

CenturyLink also supports the community through contributions and employee volunteerism. A few of the organizations that the company supports include the United Way, ULM, Louisiana Tech, the Children's Museum of Northeast Louisiana and the Monroe Chamber of Commerce.

Follow Greg Hilburn on Twitter @GregHilburn1