

# River region to study labor

Survey to collect job data for port-parishes initiative

- By [GARY PERILLOUX](#)
- Advocate business writer
- Published: Mar 12, 2008 - Page: 1D - UPDATED: 12:05 a.m.

Three Mississippi River parishes — St. James, St. Charles and St. John — and the Port of South Louisiana want to identify the current work force reality and future job needs of their region.

To do that, they've hired a local firm and a national consulting company that will mail surveys to area employers, beginning Monday.

Wadley-Donovan Group, of New Jersey, which bills itself as the nation's leading corporate location, economic development and work force development consultancy, is leading the survey work, with Workforce Alliance, of St. Charles Parish, as the local partner.

Employers will have until April 10 to return the surveys by mail or online. All job and wage data will be confidential, reported only as part of large groups of job information representing multiple firms.

The last thorough study of River Parishes job data is six years old and doesn't reflect many changes in the post-Hurricane Katrina job world.

That world includes multibillion-dollar expansions at Marathon Oil's refinery in Garyville and Valero Energy's refinery in Norco.

"We have a demand for jobs in this area that has never ended — especially with the Marathon plant that's being expanded and Valero's expansion," said Linda Prudhomme, business development manager for the Port of South Louisiana. "There's a lot of opportunity for very good construction jobs in this area and some of those construction workers might end up being the permanent workers in these plants."

A pre-Katrina labor market survey in 2002 showed more than 8,000 people were under-employed, meaning they were working but had skills that could lead them to better jobs, particularly if a major new employer were to enter the area.

In 2006 and 2007, German-based ThyssenKrupp scrutinized the River Parishes while considering a nearly 3,000-acre St. James Parish site for a potential \$4 billion-plus steel mill.

An Alabama site won the competition for thousands of jobs associated with the mill, in part because ThyssenKrupp had qualms about Louisiana's ability to satisfy the project's labor demand.

Prudhomme said ThyssenKrupp spoke to human resources executives from more than a dozen companies of all sizes from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, but, “You really need something on hand that spells out what is going on in the world today in your labor force.

“This will be mostly for new companies coming into the region who need to look at a work force profile,” she said. “It’s a profile of the existing skilled labor, a profile of the average wage that is paid at various levels of jobs that are being offered in the area, as well as the educational levels.”

Among other measurements, the survey asks employers to rank their job applicants on a scale of 1 to 5 on such measures as overall skills and reading, writing, math, thinking and team skills.

Companies are asked about their success in recruiting people from outside the region. The survey asks employers how many workers are eligible for retirement in the next five years, what are the three top occupations affected most by retirement eligibility and how successful the company expects to be in filling those positions.

Work ethic, overtime, productivity, punctuality, apprenticeships, training from educational institutions, turnover, absenteeism, training needs and quality of life issues are other survey topics.

Joel T. Chaisson, the Port of South Louisiana executive director, said a new sugar mill is being built in the region and three new petrochemical tank storage farms as well as the first all-new refinery in several decades are considering new facilities — all placing greater demands on the work force.

“There’s no question that if we’re going to continue to grow, the work force has got to grow,” he said. “We’ve got to stop the outflux of our children going to other places to find jobs and we’ve got to create good new jobs to make them want to stay here.”

The 54-mile port district is the largest port by tonnage in the Western Hemisphere and is partnering with local parishes to find work-force solutions. The Louisiana Technical College’s River Parishes campus in Reserve also is part of the solution, Chaisson said.

“You hear the general complaint all over that we don’t have the work force we need,” he said. “Well, we need to identify that as such, whether we do or don’t.”

Costs of the \$75,000 study are being defrayed by a \$35,000 matching grant from the state Department of Economic Development, with the three parishes and the Port of South Louisiana splitting the remaining \$40,000 cost equally.

St. James, St. Charles and St. John parishes have had a cooperative endeavor agreement with the Port of South Louisiana since 2004 to pursue economic development efforts. Collectively, that partnership is known as the River Region Economic Development Initiative.

Prudhomme said the study should be completed in about three months after the April 10 close of the survey. Local companies and business prospects will have access to the job data after that to inform their hiring and relocation strategies.

The effort six years ago focused heavily on the underemployed in the region. That focus continues in this initiative, but more comprehensive data will be included in the study, with Workforce Alliance gathering information from recent job fairs and the human resources departments of many of the river-based plants, Prudhomme said.

“We’re sticking a shovel in the dirt and we’re turning it over several times to find everything we can,” she said.

```
#bottom_space { margin: 0; } .bold { font-weight: bold; } .bullet { border: none; } .italic { font-style: italic; } .floated { float: left; } .clear-both { clear: both; } .margin-bottom { margin-bottom: 10px; } .margin-top { margin-top: 10px; } .plain-list { list-style: none; margin: 0; padding: 0; } #story { font: 13px Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; width: 625px; } #story a { color: #04298f; font-weight: bold; text-decoration: none; } #story a:hover { color: #d00; text-decoration: underline; } #story h1 { font-size: 28px; font-weight: bold; } #sidebar { background: #fff; width: 200px; } #sidebar #databox { width: 100%; } #sidebar #databox .header { background: #04298f; color: #fff; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px; } #sidebar #databox .data { border: 1px solid #888; border-top: none; font-size: 11px; line-height: 14px; padding: 5px; } #sidebar #columnist-info { border-bottom: 1px solid #888; font-style: italic; padding: 10px 0; } #sidebar #related-links li { line-height: 18px; } #sidebar #related-links .bulleted { list-style: disc; list-style-position: inside; } #sidebar .sidebar-ad { margin-top: 15px; } #sidebar #additional-items { margin-top: 15px; } #sidebar #videobox-header { background: #04298f; color: #fff; font-weight: bold; padding: 2px; } #sidebar #videobox { border: 1px solid #888; border-top: none; font-size: 11px; line-height: 14px; padding: 5px; } #sidebar #videobox .image { border: 1px solid #222; float: right; } #main-container { width: 425px !important; width: 410px; } #main-content { float: right; width: 400px !important; width: 385px; } #main-content #subheadline { color: #000; font-size: 18px; font-weight: bold; } #author-etc li { line-height: 16px; } #comments-tally { background: url(http://media.2theadvocate.com/designimages/silkyComments.gif) transparent top left no-repeat; height: 16px; line-height: 16px; margin-bottom: 10px; padding-left: 23px; } #main-content .pagination { font-family: Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; } #main-content .pagination a:hover, .pagination a:active { color: #04298f; background: #dce2f1; text-decoration: none; } #main-content .page-total { margin-right: 10px; } #main-content #body { color: #000; font-family: Georgia, Times, serif; font-size: 15px; line-height: 20px } #right_ad_inside { margin: 0; } nobr { display: none; }
```

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/business/16586966.html?showAll=y&c=y>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © 1992-2008, 2theadvocate.com, WBRZ, Louisiana Broadcasting LLC and The Advocate, Capital City Press LLC, All Rights Reserved.