



HEALTH & WELL-BEING @ ISSUE

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New Healthcare Access Grant Lifting Barriers

 THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION

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On the cover: Outpatient Medical Center Medical Assistant Katie Lovell cares for student Boss LaCaze at the school-based health center at L.P. Vaughn Elementary in Natchitoches.

Photo above: Family Nurse Practitioner Mary Lancaster gives Miesha Miller a check-up.

INCREASING ACCESS To Healthcare Services

A grant opportunity created by The Rapides Foundation is providing children and adults living in some of the most rural communities of Central Louisiana better access to healthcare services.

The Healthcare Access Grant is a three-year grant that funds federally qualified health centers to provide services either through a new access point or through a school-based health center throughout Central Louisiana. These clinics offer primary care, behavioral health and dental services to make it more convenient for people to get the healthcare they need.

Research shows rural areas disproportionately experience diminished access to healthcare. This results in significant health disparities – including higher rates of chronic disease and indicators of poor overall health – compared to urban communities.

To address this problem, the Foundation in 2014 began accepting proposals to fund efforts to reverse the cycle of poor health outcomes and lack of healthcare access. Specifically, grants valued at \$300,000 a year were awarded to FQHCs and FQHC Look-Alikes to expand critical services to underserved areas in Central Louisiana by expanding their primary care access with integrated behavioral and oral health services or establishing new “access points” for services.

“Access to quality healthcare is important to reduce health disparities and improve health status for people in our service area,” said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation. “We know that financial barriers, personal and cultural barriers, not knowing what to do or where to go, physical or geographic barriers, and shortages in healthcare professionals and facilities are factors that limit people’s access to quality healthcare. We believe our Healthcare Access grant opportunity has lifted some of these barriers and provided residents throughout Central Louisiana with increased access to vital healthcare services.”

Healthcare Access grants are being used to fund the following clinics:

- The Winn Community Health Center, in partnership with the Rapides Parish School Board, is establishing school-based health centers in five Rapides Parish schools. Clinics have already opened in Alexandria Middle Magnet, Huddle Elementary and Peabody High Schools. The locations for the remaining two centers have not been announced.
- Winn Community Health Center, in partnership with the Grant Parish School Board, opened a school-based health center at South Grant Elementary to serve students at five rural Grant Parish schools.
- A grant to the Outpatient Medical Center, in



The Outpatient Medical Center team at the school-based health center at L.P. Vaughn Elementary School, from left: Jackie Carroll, Medical Assistant; Shelby Beaudion, Licensed Practical Nurse; Katie Lovell, Medical Assistant; and Mary Lancaster, Family Nurse Practitioner.

partnership with the Natchitoches Parish School Board, established a school-based health center at L.P. Vaughn Elementary, serving students in both L.P. Vaughn and Natchitoches Junior High schools.

- Winn Community Health Center was awarded another Healthcare Access Grant that funded creation of a new FQHC, the East Grant Community Health center in Pollock.
- The Iberia Comprehensive Community Health Center will use its grant to expand health center services in Vernon Parish.
- The Catahoula Parish Hospital Service District #2 received a grant that expanded primary care services at Harrisonburg Family Health clinic.
- Access Health of Louisiana received a grant to expand primary care services at the Woodworth Community Health Center in Woodworth.

The Healthcare Access Grant is part of the Foundation's Healthcare Access Initiative, which addresses medication access and cancer screenings; fosters the establishment and expansion of primary care access with integrated behavioral and oral health services; and addresses related medical manpower issues. The Initiative

falls under the Foundation's Healthy People priority area.

SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS OFFER PREVENTIVE, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE FOR STUDENTS, STAFF

School-based health centers are currently operating in L.P. Vaughn Elementary in Natchitoches Parish, South Grant Elementary in Grant Parish, and Alexandria Middle Magnet, Huddle Elementary and Peabody High schools in Rapides Parish. The clinics are open during school hours and serve students whose parents have signed consent forms. School staff also can use the school-based health centers, saving them time away from work to go to medical appointments.

The school-based health clinics are staffed by nurse practitioners and other medical professionals, including licensed practical nurses and social workers. The centers each have a collaborating physician who is available for consultations, and patients with critical needs are referred to specialists.



Outpatient Medical Center Medical Assistant Jackie Carroll checks in students at the school-based health center in Natchitoches Parish.

The school-based health centers offer the same primary care services offered in physician’s offices. This includes well-child checks, immunizations, sports physicals, pediatric and adult medicine, behavioral health treatment and evaluations and, in some cases, dental care. The centers also offer urgent care services.

“The programs are designed to keep children in school and parents at work. We try to become part of the landscape where students are comfortable coming to seek healthcare, and our mission is to keep them well and in school. We try to remove any barriers to learning that we can in the healthcare arena,” said Deano Thornton, CEO of Winn Community Health Center, which also operates as Trinity Community Health Centers.

The school centers also employ Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Clinical Social Workers to provide confidential mental and behavioral health services for students and staff. This includes private counseling for students who suffer from ADHD, anxiety disorders, bullying and family problems. In addition, the school-based health centers offer group counseling to help students cope with the pressures associated with high-stakes testing, Thornton said. “We are there to make it a better learning experience for the child.”

Clinic staff members keep up with each student so they know when the student is due for immunizations, wellness checkups and dental cleanings, Thornton said. Billing is handled directly through the patient’s insurance company.

Thornton said about 90 percent of the students treated at the school-based clinic are on Louisiana Medicaid. Parents on private insurance sign their children up for clinic services because they enjoy the convenience and the staff, he added.

Carl Walters II is CEO of Outpatient Medical Center Inc., which operates the school-based health center at L.P. Vaughn in Natchitoches. “To see this health center positively touching children’s health on a daily basis is overwhelming for me as the CEO of this system. I can tell you firsthand there are kids who are getting services via this school-based health center that they might not otherwise be receiving,” he said. “To see these kids not having to come out of school, to see school administration, staff not have to take time off work to go off campus to see a doctor or to be seen for their services, it’s just profound.”

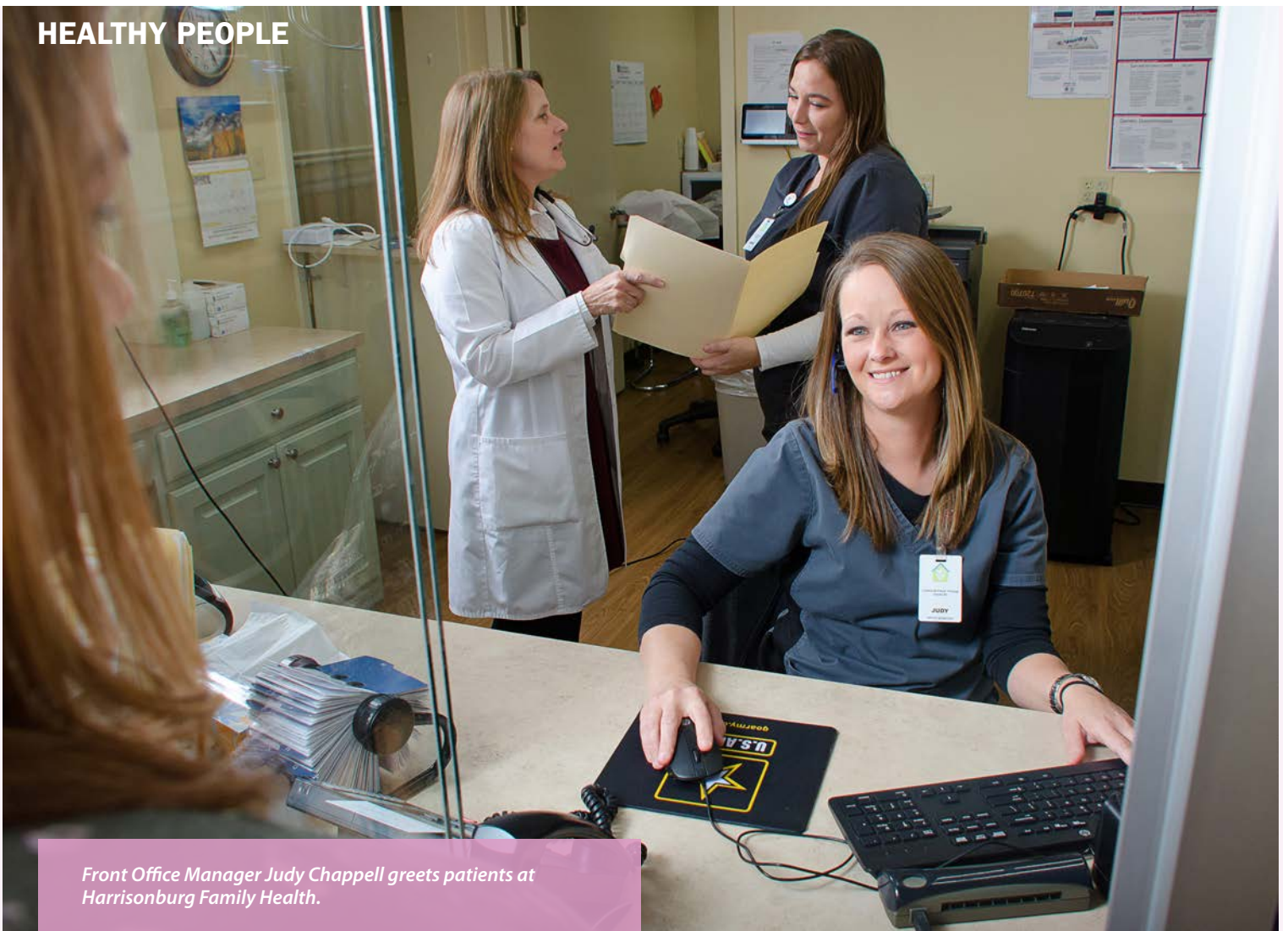
Mary Katherine Lancaster, Family Nurse Practitioner at the L.P. Vaughn school-based health center, said parents and caregivers appreciate the convenience and the attention center personnel give to their loved ones.

“Some grandparents are raising their children’s children, so you hear the struggles they have and they are just very appreciative of the services,” she said. “Parents and grandparents love that we can write a prescription and go ahead and get it to the pharmacy for them. With the children, seeing their faces has been very rewarding. You can definitely tell that they feel loved when they come in here.”

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS EXPANDING WITH HEALTHCARE ACCESS GRANT FUNDING

Healthcare Access grant funds are being used to either expand services or establish new access points at health clinics in four Central Louisiana

HEALTHY PEOPLE



Front Office Manager Judy Chappell greets patients at Harrisonburg Family Health.

parishes. The clinics accept Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance, and apply a discount fee schedule for families who do not have health insurance.

East Grant Community Health is an FQHC that opened its doors in Fall 2017 on U.S. Highway 165 in Pollock. Winn Community Health Center already operated a community health clinic in Colfax, but recognized the need for healthcare services on the other side of the parish, Thornton said.

The new clinic was built to accommodate three primary care providers and a behavioral health counselor, and the architectural design allows for future expansion. The center serves insured and uninsured patients, Thornton said. "Billing for our uninsured patients is based on household income on a sliding scale. So people who qualify can be seen by a physician for as little as \$20."

Approximately 10 employees, including two nurse practitioners and a licensed social worker,

work at the site, which is open Mondays through Fridays. Because it is a primary care facility, scheduled appointments take priority, but the center does handle walk-in patients.

"Many people are challenged to find access to quality healthcare. We are making it available in Grant Parish. Most of our employees are residents of Grant Parish and they want to do things for their community, and we are giving them the opportunity to do that."

All of the health clinics are designed to be self-sustaining once the three-year grant cycle ends. "That's the way the grant is designed, and that's the way we approached it, to be able to build up the program to where it will sustain itself at the end of the three years of funding provided by the Foundation," Thornton said.

Debra K. Miesch, CEO of the Catahoula Parish Hospital District #2, said Harrisonburg Family Health provides a service that is much needed in a rural community like Catahoula Parish.

The Rapides Foundation grant allowed the district to expand services at a clinic that was located at the Harrisonburg Medi-Thrift Pharmacy. Harrisonburg Family Health is one of five parish clinics operated by the hospital district. A nurse practitioner and other medical staff offer primary care services at the Harrisonburg clinic, and patients are referred to other clinics in the district for dental and behavioral health services. The hospital district provides transportation between the clinics for the convenience of the patients and to continue its mission of providing cost-effective care to residents of Catahoula Parish.

“With the funding from The Rapides Foundation, we are able to keep the provider in the office full time, we are able to keep our doors open and we are able to expand our services,” Miesch said. “Here in rural areas, people do not always have transportation to drive to Alexandria or Monroe or Natchez for medical services. Over 80 percent of our population is at 200 percent of

poverty or below in this area. So they don’t have a lot of money.”

Patients who do not have insurance are charged according to family income and family size. “We plug that information into the federal fee scale that tells us whether you are going to pay the minimum, which is \$20, or whether you are going to pay 30 percent to 75 percent of the total charge.”

The Woodworth Community Center in Rapides Parish expanded its services in 2016 when the South Louisiana-based Access Health Louisiana assumed operations with funding from The Rapides Foundation’s Healthcare Access Grant. Access Health, the largest network of Federally Qualified Health Centers in Louisiana, was operating 10 clinics and 10 school-based health centers in South Louisiana when it began operating the Woodworth clinic, Access Health President and CEO Mark Keiser said.

“From a population health perspective, rural



Nurse Practitioner Tracy Kelone assists patient Katie Stutson at Harrisonburg Family Health.



The staff of Harrisonburg Family Health, from left: Front Office Manager Judy Chappell, Nurse Practitioner Tracy Kelone and LPN Amber Scroggs.

America is underserved and less healthy than suburban and urban areas, and it doesn't have facilities. Fortunately it's not a long distance from Alexandria to Woodworth. It's only 15 minutes or so, but for some people those 15 minutes could be 150 miles if you don't have transportation. And then when you compound that with poverty, because rural areas tend to have more poverty, put that in the equation and now you have less healthy people, less availability of providers, and we have less money to pay for things that we need," he said. "Access Health recognizes that. We understand those social dynamics."

In its first two years as part of the Access Health network, the Woodworth Community Center won the organization's Most Successful Location award in terms of quality performance, Keiser said. "They set a standard for us."

Iberia Comprehensive Community Health Center, based in New Iberia, currently operates health centers in six parishes. It was recently awarded a Healthcare Access Grant that will be used to provide primary care, dental and behavioral health services in Vernon Parish.

Keiser and others credited The Rapides Foundation with identifying a healthcare need and providing funding to address it. "Healthcare

in Central Louisiana would be considerably less developed and successful had The Rapides Foundation not taken the initiative they've taken, and Access Health is just one small example of it. It is extremely important, vitally important to the people of Woodworth and to us at Access Health," Keiser said.

"We are forever in debt to The Rapides Foundation for their commitment to making sure everyone has access to culturally sensitive, medically appropriate primary care services. We could not have done what we have accomplished here without their ongoing support," Walters said. "I think the community at large owes them a great sense of gratitude for helping to improve the health and well-being of our children."





THE ORCHARD FOUNDATION AWARDED \$4.5 MILLION GRANT

Dr. Marjorie Taylor, Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation, announces a \$4.5 million grant that will increase STEM-trained middle school teachers in Cenla.

The Orchard Foundation has been awarded \$4,482,635 by the U.S. Department of Education to recruit, train, support and retain effective math and science teachers in Central Louisiana middle schools.

The Orchard Foundation and project partners committed in-kind matched funding of non-federal funds in the amount of \$8,801,519 to implement the Central Louisiana Instructional Partnership or CLIP. This is The Orchard Foundation's first grant under the USDOE's Teacher Quality Partnership grant program.

The goal of the Central Louisiana Instructional Partnership project is to improve student achievement in nine rural, high-need school districts in up to 70 schools in Central Louisiana by preparing highly qualified educators to teach

in critical shortage areas – middle school math and science. CLIP will address the high teacher turnover and shortages facing rural schools by developing and implementing a model of middle school math and science teacher preparation. The model will be an innovative teacher residency program with integrated professional development and induction support. In turn, CLIP is expected to produce measurable positive impacts on the academic achievement of low-performing rural Central Louisiana students in grades 6-8.

The Orchard Foundation, a nonprofit local education fund and the education arm of The Rapides Foundation, will serve as the lead organization for the Central Louisiana Instructional Partnership. CLIP Project Partners include: the nine Central Louisiana School Districts of

rapidesfoundation.org

EDUCATION

Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn; Northwestern State University's Gallaspy College of Education & Human Development and College of Business & Technology-Computer Information Systems; Urban Learning & Leadership Center; EvalWorks; and The Rapides Foundation, which will provide grant administrative support.

"The CLIP partners have worked together for many years to assess the challenges faced by the rural public school districts in Central Louisiana, confronting the enduring and often deeply entrenched obstacles to improved teaching and student achievement," said Dr. Marjorie Taylor, Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation. "CLIP will leverage this work to dramatically improve teacher preparation and ultimately work to close the achievement gap among rural students in an underserved region of Louisiana."

Applicants selected for the CLIP program will complete a 15-month accelerated graduate program of study culminating in a Master of Arts in teaching degree from Northwestern State University and a professional teaching license. They will receive a stipend during their training. While completing their graduate coursework, CLIP residents will be immersed in an academic year school-based residency in a high-need school identified by the nine partner public school districts. They will experience a variety of learning opportunities alongside a trained and experienced mentor teacher. NSU's College of Education will lead the mentoring program as an extension of their supervision of the clinical residency component of the program.

"The opportunity to diminish the critical shortage of middle school math and science teachers in Central Louisiana is exciting," Dr. Kim McAlister, Dean of the Gallaspy College of Education & Human Development, said. "Recruiting, preparing, and equipping teachers to improve student achievement is our passion in teacher preparation. We look forward to this challenge. Faculty from the School of Education and Computer Information Systems will collaboratively prepare four cohorts of



Central Louisiana
Instructional Partnership

teachers in a 15-month program, culminating in both certification and a master's degree."

CLIP residents will receive content expertise in STEM teaching techniques by NSU's Computer Information Systems Department ensuring they will possess the content knowledge to implement STEM lessons using the latest technology in their classrooms.

Upon completion of the program, graduates will be placed in CLIP-participating schools and will receive two years of induction support with sustained coaching and professional development delivered by CLIP partner Urban Learning and Leadership Center. CLIP will identify, select, train and support highly effective school-based coaches that will carry out the rigorous induction process. CLIP graduates are expected to be retained in Central Louisiana high-need schools for at least three years as part of the CLIP agreement. EvalWorks, another CLIP partner, will provide an independent evaluation of the program to ensure project goals and objectives are being met.

Over five years, CLIP is expected to recruit, retain, and support 44 new highly qualified middle school math and science teachers in high-need schools in Central Louisiana. Additionally, 44 teachers within the school district will be trained as mentors for the field-based residency, and 44 school district educators will also learn coaching techniques to implement a regional induction program.

Applications for the first cohort of CLIP residents will be accepted in spring 2019, with a program start date scheduled for summer 2019.

Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation, said the CLIP project will play an important role in improving educational attainment and achievement in the region. "Research shows that the leading school-based effects for student success are the teacher that's in the classroom with the students and the leadership within the school and school district," Rosier said. "The CLIP project serves to increase that pipeline of very effective, STEM-trained teachers going into schools throughout the region where they are needed the most."



Community activist Jason Thompson interacts with students at the Youth Summit on Healthy Behaviors.



2018 YOUTH SUMMIT ON HEALTHY BEHAVIORS

More than 650 junior high and high school students and teachers from seven Central Louisiana parishes came together on September 19 at the Alexandria Riverfront Center for The Rapides Foundation's eighth annual Youth Summit on Healthy Behaviors. The summit is a one-day event for summit participants to learn how to become advocates for healthy choices and policy change in their schools and communities.

The Youth Summit is part of the Foundation's Healthy Behaviors Initiative, and is attended each year by students and teachers participating in the Foundation's Healthy Behaviors School District Partnership Grant. The goal of the grant is to provide students and teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to make better and informed behavior decisions which they use to implement activities during the school year. Participating school districts in the 2018-19 grant are: Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, Natchitoches, Rapides and Vernon.



Youth Advocacy Council members worked throughout the year to plan the summit and develop an advocacy project.

The theme of the Youth Summit on Healthy Behaviors was *#MoveMore #EatWell #LiveClean*. It was planned by a group of youth advocates from throughout Cenla who serve on the Foundation's Youth Advocacy Council.

"The Youth Advocacy Council members work hard all year to plan the summit for their peers and to develop an advocacy project which they present during the summit," said Trayce Snow, Senior Program Officer at The Rapides Foundation. "Their participation in YAC allows them to learn leadership, team-building, research and public speaking skills."

The advocacy project developed by YAC members was shared with summit participants so they can take the project back to their own schools and communities and implement it. The 2018-19 advocacy project focuses on enforcement of USDA Smart Snacks Guidelines in schools. The goal of the project is for students to work within their schools to replace unhealthy foods in school concessions with healthy alternatives which follow the Smart Snacks Guidelines put in place by the USDA in July 2014.

In addition to learning about the advocacy project, students and teachers participated in breakout sessions focused on the issues of tobacco prevention, substance and alcohol abuse prevention, and healthy eating and active living. Presenters included nationally recognized advocates in those focus areas as well as youth advocates from other parts of the country who traveled to the summit to share their own experiences. "The peer-to-peer interaction is powerful," Snow explained. "Young people can see that kids their age are doing important things to create change in their communities."

The opening session, "It Adds Up To Advocacy," was presented by Jason Thompson, co-founder and owner of marketing firm Fahrenheit Creative Group. Thompson is a community activist who is passionate about equity in education, housing, health and other quality of life standards.

Thompson wanted youth advocates to leave the summit with a plan for change. "The one thing I want young people to take away from the summit today is knowing that tomorrow they can start making change happen in their schools and communities."



Students participated in energizer activities during the annual summit.



CENLA BOARDBUILDERS PREPARES LEADERS FOR NONPROFIT BOARD SERVICE

Cenla BoardBuilders, a leadership development program for emerging leaders to become active as members of local nonprofit boards, graduated its 2018 class on October 19.

Through Cenla BoardBuilders, a program of Community Development Works and The Rapides Foundation, participants are trained through a series of sessions on the roles and responsibilities of an effective board member. Two learning tracks are available: Track I, for newly seated board members with limited service experience who are seeking training only; and Track II, for individuals with no previous board service who are seeking training and help to connect with local nonprofits.

"We think it's absolutely necessary that nonprofits have board members that are trained, know what their role is as board members, and have the skills to contribute to the board," said Ashley Stewart, Director of Programs for The Rapides Foundation. "We believe this program helps build nonprofit capacity and strength in Central Louisiana."

The 2018 program graduates join a group of 202 Cenla BoardBuilders alumni.

CENLA BOARDBUILDERS

The following graduates completed the 2018 Cenla BoardBuilders Program:

Track I: Currently serving on a board

- Diane Barney, retired; Nonprofit Partner: Vernon Parish Tourism Commission.
- Elize Howerton, retired; Nonprofit Partner: Vernon Parish Tourism Commission.

Track II: Seeking board service

- Linda Carpenter, Medical Laboratory Technologist, CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital.
- Sylvia Coody, Secretary, Coody Roofing.
- Sem Ganthier, Assistant Vice President of Operations, Rapides Regional Medical Center.
- Tessa Myrick, Grant Monitor, Self employed.
- Cornelia Pickens-Sutton, retired.
- Tomyka Sanders, Executive Administrative Assistant, Rapides Parish Drug Court.
- Joseph Sharp, Human Resources Manager, Diamond B Construction.
- Trayce Snow, Senior Program Officer, The Rapides Foundation.
- Nicholas Wright, student, Walden University.

Employer partners participate in the program by allowing their employee time off during work hours to attend training sessions and board meetings. Nonprofit partners connect with Cenla BoardBuilders graduates to offer board service opportunities.

To learn full details about Cenla BoardBuilders or participate in the 2019 program, call CDW at 318-443-7880 or toll free at 1-800-803-8075. Community Development Works is a program of The Rapides Foundation.



Cenla BoardBuilders participant Cornelia Pickens-Sutton talked about her program experience at the graduation ceremony.



Community Development Works

Helping People Build Communities in Central Louisiana

A Program of:



THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION



CENLA EXECBUILDERS

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR NONPROFIT EXECUTIVES

Six Central Louisiana nonprofit leaders graduated September 28 from Cenla ExecBuilders, a leadership development program for nonprofit executive directors.

Cenla ExecBuilders, a program of Community Development Works, is designed to identify and develop knowledgeable, skilled, committed, and action-oriented leaders who will have maximum impact on the communities and constituents they serve in an environment of change and competing priorities.

The following graduates completed the five-month program designed for nonprofit executive directors seeking training and professional coaching support:

- Crystal M. Bowie, Assistant Extension Agent, Rapides 4-H.
- Gabrielle Juneau, Chief Executive Officer, Central Louisiana Area Health Education Center.
- Claire Lemoine, Executive Director, Cenla Pregnancy Center.

- Ashley Martin, Acting Executive Director, Avoyelles Society for the Developmentally Disabled.
- Catherine Pears, Executive Director, Alexandria Museum of Art.
- Jessica Viator, Executive Director, Manna House.

The graduates now join a group of 44 Cenla ExecBuilders alumni who participate in the program's peer leadership network. Cenla ExecBuilders is a free program, and is open to new or experienced executive directors in Cenla who want to become more effective in their role as leaders of local nonprofit organizations.

To participate in the 2019 program, call CDW at 318-443-7880 or toll free at 1-800-803-8075. For full details about Cenla ExecBuilders and to complete the online application, visit the CDW website at communitydevelopmentworks.org. Community Development Works is a program of The Rapides Foundation.





The Rapides Foundation

2018

SYMPOSIUM

EVENT SPOTLIGHTED FACTORS THAT IMPACT HEALTH

The Rapides Foundation held its fifth annual Symposium Thursday, September 6, with featured speaker Julie Willems Van Dijk introducing attendees to factors that impact health in a community, offering a snapshot of the region’s health data, and introducing tools that can be used to initiate change in the community. Dr. Willems Van Dijk is the director of the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program.

Each year the Foundation presents the Symposium as a way to gather around a topic of importance and to recognize the creation of The Rapides Foundation on September 1, 1994. The focus of the 2018 Symposium was “Improving Health.”

The Symposium presentation, “Improving Health for Everyone: What Can You Do?,” focused on the things that drive health, how to interpret health rankings data, and the steps that can

be taken to advance health. The Rankings are guided by a model of population health that emphasizes the many social, economic, physical, clinical, and other factors that influence both how long and how well we live. They help communities understand the critical influence that education, jobs, income, environment, and other factors have on individual health and illuminate areas of need for focusing improvement efforts.

“The model used by County Health Rankings & Roadmaps establishes health as life expectancy – living longer, free of disease,” said Joe Rosier, president and CEO of The Rapides Foundation. “The Foundation uses the same approach in support of our mission to improve the health status of Central Louisiana. Over its 24-year history, The Rapides Foundation has developed initiatives and strategies intended to positively impact the region for decades to come.”



Featured speaker Julie Willems Van Dijk (photo on Page 16) and Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation (photo above) address the crowd at the Foundation's 2018 Symposium.

The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program is a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. The program releases annual rankings that measure vital health factors in nearly every county in America, which creates a starting point for change in communities. It also provides a roadmap through guidance and tools to understand a communities' data, along with strategies communities can use to move into action. The program offers detailed data and tools on its website at countyhealthrankings.org.

As a way to prepare for the Symposium, The Rapides Foundation partnered with County Health Rankings & Roadmaps to have program coaches facilitate Community Conversation meetings in each of the nine parishes the Foundation serves. Those conversations led residents to identify issues they felt could be addressed to help improve health in their communities. A video

capturing the conversations was introduced at the Symposium and can be seen on the Foundation's YouTube channel.

The Rapides Foundation focuses its works in three strategic areas: Healthy People, to improve access to healthcare and promote healthy behaviors; Education, to increase the level of educational attainment and achievement as the primary path to improved economic, social and health status; and Healthy Communities, to improve economic opportunity and family income, and enhance civic and community opportunities for more effective leaders and organizations.

Since the Foundation's creation in 1994, it has disbursed more than \$200 million in grants. The Rapides Foundation serves a nine-parish area in Central Louisiana consisting of Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn parishes.





CENLA TENTH GRADE STUDENTS ATTEND ANNUAL SECO EVENT

The Orchard Foundation held its annual Students Exploring Career Opportunities (SECO) Expo on November 14 and 15 at the Alexandria Riverfront Center. SECO is an interactive career expo for Central Louisiana tenth graders designed to introduce students to career possibilities.

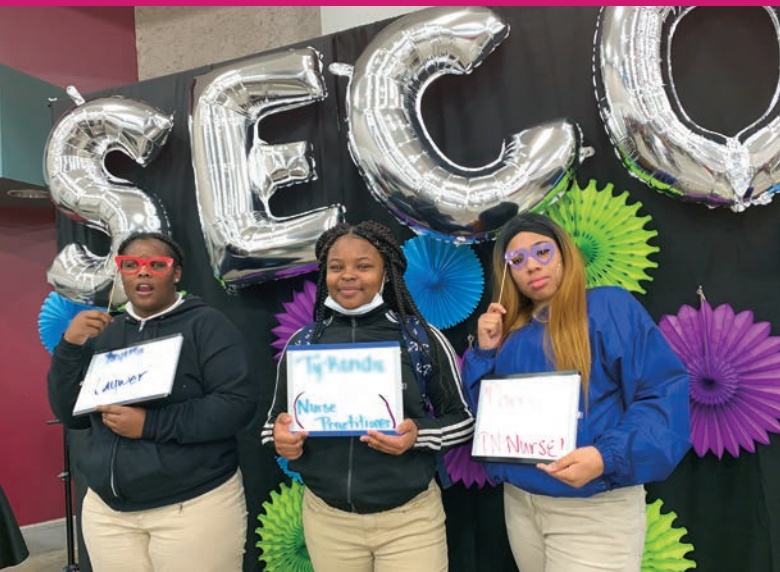
The SECO Expo allows students to experience simulations and hands-on activities at a variety of stations staffed by area businesses with the goal of fostering student engagement and ultimately sparking an interest in future careers. This is the fifth SECO event presented by The Orchard Foundation, The Rapides Foundation and the nine public school districts in Central Louisiana.

SECO was attended by almost 3,000 tenth grade public, private and home-schooled students from nine Central Louisiana parishes over the two-day period. Students traveled from Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn parishes.

The event is funded by The Rapides Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana, Capital One, Sam's Club and the North Mall Drive Walmart in Alexandria.

"From the business perspective it's very important that they start engaging with students as early as they can," explained Dr. Marjorie Taylor, Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation. "Obviously at the tenth grade level the conversations between the students and employers are more engaging because students have an idea as to what their interests are, and they are prepared with questions. The business partners really appreciate that."

The purpose of the SECO Expo is to allow tenth grade students to learn about different career opportunities available in Central Louisiana and the requirements of those careers, so they will be better informed to choose a path into the workforce. Tenth grade students must choose to pursue the TOPS University diploma or the Jump Start TOPS Tech diploma at the end of



Central Louisiana students enjoy the interactive exhibits at the 2018 Students Exploring Career Opportunities event.



“From the business perspective it’s very important that they start engaging with students as early as they can.”

Dr. Marjorie Taylor,
Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation

their sophomore year based on the Louisiana Department of Education’s plan to implement these pathways to help prepare students for future success.

Deona Austin, School Counselor at Winnfield Senior High School, said SECO allows students to see what’s coming ahead and what’s going to be required of them. “By coming to SECO, students are able to interact with some businesses that we don’t have in our area and it peaks their interest a little bit,” she said. “It makes them start to realize that adulthood is coming and that there are responsibilities coming up too.”

Cenla businesses set up interactive exhibits to represent various career clusters including healthcare, information technology, public safety, manufacturing, education, construction and more. Through participation, business and community leaders play an active role in helping students make informed career decisions, while making a



SECO

To view a photo gallery of the 2018 SECO event, visit rapidesfoundation.org

SECO EVENT

long-term investment for a better Cenla workforce in the future.

Stella-Jones is a manufacturing company and one of many business partners which has participated in annual SECO events. Plant Manager Steve Bryant explained, "Stella-Jones believes the future begins early and by supporting local community programs such as SECO not only can we give back to Cenla but also help develop our future workforce."

The Orchard Foundation wants businesses to know how much their participation is valued. "We're so appreciative of the activities the businesses provide," Taylor said. "They make the activities as interactive as they possibly can so students are engaged. We're just very pleased every year with the numbers of new activities they bring, the uniqueness of it, the creativity that's involved and the commitment of time it takes to be here with the students for two days."

If interested in participating in the 2019 SECO event, businesses should contact The Orchard Foundation at 318-767-6561.



The Cenla Jobinator questions students about their career choices at the 2018 SECO event.

THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION

The Rapides Foundation continues a legacy of community healthcare initiated in 1903.

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