



Sales & Marketing Executives' Baton Rouge Economic Development Panelists:

ROBERT ABBOUD

Robert Abboud is the Assistant Director of Community Competitiveness at Louisiana Economic Development. With six years of prior experience in association management within the legal field, Robby has developed statewide contacts in both private and public sectors. He earned his Master of Public Administration (MPA) from Louisiana State University in 2014, where he served as Treasurer of the Public Administration Institute Student Association (PAISA). Robby is in the process of completing training through the Louisiana Industrial Development Executives Association's (LIDEA) Certified Louisiana Economic Developer (CLED) Community Development Program.

Robby is responsible for the development and statewide implementation of LED's Community Competitiveness Initiative (CCI). The CCI program is designed to enhance community competitiveness by focusing on economic development capacity and readiness at local levels. The initiative raises awareness of the processes of economic development and the necessary factors to achieve success. It provides community leaders with clear direction on specific resources needed to foster successful economic development while increasing collaboration between municipal, parish, regional, and state economic development practitioners.

Robby also functions as the Executive Director of the Louisiana Military Advisory Council (LMAC). LMAC was formed to provide a forum for issues concerning the installations and units of the Armed Forces located in Louisiana and the military and retired military personnel and their families who reside in Louisiana. They are responsible for formulating goals and objectives to enhance cooperation, coordination, communication, and understanding among the military, United States Department of Defense, the Louisiana Congressional Delegation, the communities in the state interfacing with the military, and state and local government agencies.

SAM BENTLEY

Sam Bentley Sr., Geology Professor and Billy and Ann Harrison Chair in Sedimentary Geology at LSU, is also Vice President for Research & Economic Development.

Bentley first came to LSU in 1999 and has also held academic positions at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada, and the Naval Research Laboratory of Stennis Space Center. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Georgia, and a Ph.D. in coastal geological oceanography from the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

"I am deeply honored and thrilled to have the opportunity to lead ORED, serve LSU and Louisiana, and help build our research and economic development enterprise," Bentley said. "LSU plays a key role in the education, growth, and health of our state and region, and we are in the top 3 percent of U.S. colleges and universities in terms of research productivity. We have much to be proud of, much still to do, and I am excited to lead the charge for our university."

In his role as vice president, Bentley supervises all faculty and staff reporting to the Office of Research & Economic Development. He oversees the Office of Sponsored Programs, Office of Research Advancement, Office of Innovation & Technology Commercialization, Council on Research and 14 LSU centers and institutes.

Bentley's areas of scientific expertise include marine sedimentology; geological, climatic, and anthropogenic controls on coastal river deltas; and sediment radiochemistry.

CASEY O'BANION

Casey O'Banion is the Business Retention and Expansion manager at the Baton Rouge Area Chamber. In this role, he collaborates with parish partners and businesses to facilitate economic development opportunities within the Capital Region.

Prior to joining BRAC, Casey worked in energy, education, and healthcare. He managed proposal negotiations for international and domestic maritime oil projects in Houston, Texas with an emphasis on local incentives and job retention. Casey later served as an American literature teacher and Assistant Administrator at Catholic High School in Baton Rouge where he was a member of the Diversity Committee and Disciplinary Board and participated in fundraising and recruitment. Then, as a healthcare director, he led community engagement and recovery efforts during COVID-19 and hurricane seasons in southeast Louisiana.

Originally from Texarkana, TX, Casey earned a bachelor's degree in English from Louisiana State University, a Juris Doctorate from the LSU Law Center, and is currently pursuing an MFA in Los Angeles."

WHITNEY HOFFMAN SAYAL

As Executive Director for the Downtown Development District (DDD), Whitney Hoffman Sayal is responsible for carrying out the mission to initiate, incubate, and support partnerships that develop and enhance Downtown Baton Rouge. Hoffman Sayal previously worked over eight years for the DDD as Development Project Director, assisting with project management of special Downtown Development District initiatives, forming and maintaining partnerships with the public and private sector, formulating policies and procedures to implement projects, developing and managing marketing and public relationship initiatives, evaluating and updating downtown ordinances and city codes, developing grant application and reporting materials, implementing bicycle and pedestrian programs and infrastructure, and furthering the vision outlined for downtown in various Downtown Master Plan documents.

Under her leadership, the DDD and City-Parish have received several grants that funded public spaces and bicycle and pedestrian projects including the Downtown Greenway and River Road. Many of the projects she has worked on at the DDD have been recognized/awarded at the local, state, and international levels. These projects include Yazoo Plaza, North Boulevard Town Square, Repentance Park, The Crest, City Hall Plaza, Central Green, Florida Riverfront Access, Downtown Greenway, and River Road.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal has planning experience and knowledge of community and urban planning, architecture, and landscape architecture systems that she gained from her professional work and education. She has a professional bachelor's architecture degree from Louisiana Tech University and landscape architecture master's degree from Louisiana State University Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture. Hoffman Sayal is a professional planner, certified by the American Planning Association since 2012 and currently serves as the President of the Louisiana Chapter of the American Planning Association. In addition to her work at the DDD, Hoffman Sayal gained professional experience in the private, non-profit, and government sectors managing multiple types and scales of projects, plans, and programs.