

2022-2023

# STARTUP CITY

A showcase of the partnerships and people  
that make Baton Rouge a true **HOT SPOT**  
for innovators and entrepreneurs



Baton Rouge Area Chamber®

LSU

| Innovation



**NEXUS**  
LOUISIANA



# Welcome to STARTUP CITY



JOEY BORDELON

**B**aton Rouge is filled with innovators and entrepreneurs—people with big ideas and those who find a need and fill it. From technology and business to food and manufacturing, they are willing to take big risks and work hard to make it happen.

So, to all those in the Capital City who dream big, welcome to StartUp City. This publication is a valuable resource to inspire, inform and celebrate existing and future entrepreneurs in Baton Rouge.

Baton Rouge has always been an integral part of my journey with Raising Cane's – from the support I received from mentors from LSU, SCORE and the Southern University Small Business Development Center to the local community who supported my dream since 1996. This city has helped Raising Cane's grow to be Louisiana's largest restaurant company with more than 650 restaurants in 33 U.S. states and beyond. We will always be grateful to our hometown.

In these pages, you'll find a complete picture of entrepreneur programs, venture funding

and other assistance that is available to boost emerging businesses in Baton Rouge. You'll also find performance data for many programs, including jobs created, capital raised, sales growth and much more.

But best of all, you'll meet local entrepreneurs who, from anyone's perspective, are “living success stories.” These are people who “think outside the box,” who work hard to make their visions a reality, who are focused, but flexible in their efforts to create something new. I often speak to business students and aspiring entrepreneurs, and I tell them ... Find your ONE LOVE, Dream Big, Work Hard and Never Give Up!

ONE LOVE,

A stylized, handwritten signature of Todd Graves in black ink.

Todd Graves



# VENTURE

## EARLY START

**Condoleezza Semien**, 16, started her Baton Rouge company, Beluga Bliss, when she was in the eighth grade. Her inspiration? Her mother, who battles lupus. Determined to soothe her mother's pain, she started researching essential oils and herbs with the scientific components to ease the symptoms. She won the People's Choice Award at the Young Entrepreneur Academy's Saunders Scholarship Competition in New York.



“My advice to the youth who want to start a business is to start a business with a purpose in mind that is not money.”

—As told to [225] Magazine





## COMPANIES THAT ARE CRUSHING IT

**SMALLS SLIDERS:** craveable, cheeseburger drive-thru | **PASS IT DOWN:** digital biography and museum exhibits | **SPEEDY EATS:** automated kitchen | **SAFE PUSH:** medication delivery device | **PARKZEN:** app to locate available parking in real time | **TRUCE SOFTWARE:** mobile technology management | **CLICK HERE DIGITAL:** ad agency | **TRACE SECURITY:** cybersecurity firm | **CLEAR BLUE DESIGN:** software development company | **MEZZO TECHNOLOGIES:** thermal product design and manufacturing

## Won't Back Down

New company growth hasn't slowed in the Capital Region, even during the period of the pandemic. Take a look:

### 13 of 15

Recent quarters in which Capital Region new company starts experienced quarter-over-quarter growth

### 3,300 +

New establishments that exist in the Capital Region compared to Q1 2018 — even with a pandemic bisecting the time span

### 1,200 +

New establishments launched year over year in both years of the pandemic

## LAUNCH



### Triple N Oysters

In 2015, Dr. Steve Pollock started an oyster farm in Grand Isle, Louisiana, after reading an article in a local newspaper about “a better way to grow oysters.” In 2017, he launched an oyster nursery, and in 2019, he started an inland oyster hatchery using an artificial seawater closed recirculating aquaculture system at the LSU Innovation Park.



### Covalent Laboratories

Mandolin Whitney earned her doctoral degree in biomedical sciences from the Tulane School of Medicine, where she studied adult stem cells and developed commercial applications for regenerative medicine. In early 2020, she developed and implemented the first COVID-19 PCR test done by a private lab in Louisiana. She launched Covalent Laboratories in late 2020 with a focus on providing affordable testing with same-day results to private businesses, schools, and the film and television industry, among other settings.



### Suds Laundry Services

In 2018, Suds Laundry Services revolutionized the wash-and-fold and drycleaning industries in Louisiana by providing these services (including pickup and next-day delivery) all through an app. Under the leadership of owner/CEO Chris Hilliard, Suds (a current member of the Tech Park) has redeveloped software and expanded services to most of East and West Baton Rouge Parishes. Hilliard is a proud father, husband, author, speaker, and diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant.



# GET GOING

The impact of the Small Business Development Centers in the Capital Region since 2018

**145**

business starts

**988**

jobs created/supported

**\$88M**

capital

**1,600**

unique clients



## Clients served in the 9-parish area

**55%**

women

**61%**

black

**8%**

veteran status

Source: SBDC Network

# FAST GROWTH

Thirteen companies in the Greater Baton Rouge area have made the 2022 Inc. 5000 list, which highlights the fastest growing companies in the U.S.



## No. 154:

365Labs, software, 3,247% growth

## No. 1,163:

United Fire & Water Damage of LA, consumer services, 558% growth

## No. 1,639:

Integrated Payment Solutions, software, 382% growth

## No. 1,754:

Genesis 360, construction, 351% growth

## No. 2,186:

Oasis Spaces, construction, 271% growth

## No. 2,319:

Parker's Pharmacy, health products, 253% growth

## No. 3,536:

Walk-On's Sports Bistreaux, food and beverage, 146% growth

## No. 3,695:

Anytime Flooring, construction, 137% growth

## No. 4,000:

Exigo Technology Services, IT services, 121% growth

## No. 4,056:

ThreeSixtyEight, advertising and marketing, 119% growth

## No. 4,614:

Emergent Method, business products and services, 94% growth

## No. 4,638:

Facilities Maintenance Management, construction, 93% growth

## No. 4,998:

MasteryPrep, education, 80% growth

# 5 Questions About Angel Investment

With William Ellison, CEO, Red Stick Angel Network, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Innovation Catalyst Inc., a nonprofit venture development organization in Louisiana

## What are some of the companies you've helped get off the ground or grow?

Innovation Catalyst has invested in 26 companies and the Red Stick Angel Network, created in 2020, has invested in seven companies. In July 2015, Innovation Catalyst provided seed capital to MasteryPrep, a Baton Rouge based Edtech company that operates out of the Louisiana Technology Park. The company has since substantially grown and raised several large follow-on rounds of funding, including a substantial investment in early 2020 by the Red Stick Angels. Other Baton Rouge based companies that Innovation Catalyst/Red Stick Angels have provided seed capital to that have gone on to raise substantial amounts of follow-on funding include, as an example, Omnidek, Kinesics, and Iconic Moments.



## How would you describe the state of angel investment in the Capital Region?

The amount of angel investment has grown tremendously, as is evidenced by the Red Stick Angels investing more than \$3 million in local companies since 2020. As the Capital Region has more startup success stories, high net worth individuals are seeing the potential for significant investment returns in this asset class.

## How can entrepreneurs find and connect with angel investors?

Reach out to an Angel network, since many of the angels in your area will either be a member of the network or know of an accredited investor who might be interested in investing in your company.

## How should an entrepreneur prepare before meeting with a potential investor?

How to pitch to an investor is a skill that can easily be learned. Find out how to do it before attempting to do it, as sometimes you only get one shot at an investor. Know who you are pitching to and their investment thesis; know your market; know your go-to-market strategy; know your numbers and know your potential exit, i.e., who is going to buy you, why, when and for how much.





Breach Software co-founders Matthew Ieyoub, Colin Hebert and George Villaume launched their website and app development company after winning a design competition as LSU students. The company is an LSU Innovation Park tenant.

# STARTUP CITY

## WHERE CREATIVITY MEETS COLLABORATION

*As its entrepreneurial ecosystem continues to evolve, Baton Rouge ranks 6th among 40 cities for innovation and entrepreneurship*

In 2012, Richard Hanley noticed something about the Baton Rouge-born dish Sensation Salad, a straightforward salad popularized in the early sixties that's tossed with a distinct garlic lemon dressing. As beloved as the dish was, Hanley discovered, its dressing didn't exist commercially. Sensation salad existed only in cookbooks and on some restaurant menus.

To Hanley, the inability to find a bottled version of the iconic salad dressing seemed both a glaring omission and a business opportunity. He and his wife, Kate, immediately began testing sensation dressing formulas, roping in friends and family for their feedback. Settling on the perfect recipe, they launched a microenterprise and sampled the finished product at the Red Stick

Farmers Market.

"Seeing the response, that's when we knew we had something," Hanley says. "That's when we quit our jobs and went all in on this."

Within a few months, Hanley's Foods became a tenant at the LSU AgCenter Food Incubator, now called the Food Innovation Institute, or FOODii. A decade later today, the company manufactures eight different salad dressings, including its trademarked Sensation, along with croutons, vegan bacon bits and two other salad toppings.

Hanley's products are sold in 2,000 stores across 26 states, including 11 Costco locations in Louisiana and Texas, and 400 WalMart stores. Additional growth is expected this year, Hanley says.

"It's been really crazy," he says. "We've been growing really rapidly. The great thing about producing at [FOODii]



Kate and Richard Hanley participated in PitchBR.

### The Capital Region secured the 6th top spot thanks in part to:

- Number of startups formed in the region
- Percentage of self-employed firms in the overall local economy
- STEM graduates
- Academic research and development

is that we can do everything from product development to bottling in one place."

The Hanleys are part of a new generation of Baton Rouge area startup pioneers taking advantage of an entrepreneurial ecosystem that has become increasingly robust and synergistic. Supporting entrepreneurs across a wide variety of sectors, that ecosystem now includes assets like the multi-faceted LSU Office of Innovation & Ecosystem Development, comprised of the LSU Innovation Park, LSU Innovation & Technology Commercialization, and other components; Nexus Louisiana, which includes the Louisiana Technology Park; a new support arm for entrepreneurs within the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) and many other programs, funding mechanisms and events meant to accelerate small businesses.



In fact, a recent report found that the Capital Region's innovation and entrepreneurship infrastructure stands out among 39 other peer and aspirational cities within a 1,000-mile radius, says BRAC President and CEO Adam Knapp.

"There are a lot more attributes related to innovation and entrepreneurship than I think the average resident, or even members of the business community, may be fully aware of," Knapp says. "The truth is, we have a climate of ambition and a real drive to find opportunities for entrepreneurial success."

Knapp cites findings from Ernst & Young, recently hired by BRAC to produce a detailed, five-year strategic plan for the organization that involved researching Baton Rouge's strengths and weaknesses. The findings compared aspects of Baton Rouge's economic development climate with 39 regional cities with similar population sizes.

And while Baton Rouge struggled against its peers in categories like quality of life and retention of recent college graduates, the city ranked sixth of 40 cities in innovation and entrepreneurship. The number of startups formed in the region, the percentage of self-employed firms in the overall local economy, STEM graduates, academic research and development and other factors helped the Capital Region secure the 6<sup>th</sup> top spot.

The cities outranking Baton Rouge in innovation in entrepreneurship were, from first to fifth, Nashville, Huntsville, Charleston, Lexington, and Fayetteville.

Greater Baton Rouge has a long history of entrepreneurship, with small businesses serving as the backbone of the local economy, Knapp says. Assets including two local research universities, and longstanding business incubators like the LSU Innovation Park and Nexus Louisiana Technology Park, have fostered the conception and growth of scores of new businesses across a wide variety of sectors.

But resources for entrepreneurs haven't always been easy to navigate, and many have been siloed in individual organizations or disparate programs. That is no longer the case, say economic developers, who point to a new atmosphere of clarity and collaboration. For its part, BRAC has added a new staff position specifically devoted to helping innovators navigate resources and opportunities that will help propel their ideas to the next stage.

And many of those resources have become more streamlined.

In August 2021, for example, LSU announced that the university's 200-acre LSU Innovation Park, the LSU-based Small Business Development Center (a statewide program) and the Office of Innovation & Technology Commercialization were now aligned under a new organizational structure called the Office of Innovation & Ecosystem Development.

The reorganization, says LSU Associate Vice President for Research Andrew Maas, is meant to make it easier for entrepreneurs and faculty inventors to tap into state, federal, local and private



resources that can sometimes seem labyrinthine. "Our goal is to be a collaborator and strategic partner for business, innovation, commercialization and technology transfer," says Maas. In 2021, Maas adds, LSU was named in the Top 100 of universities with U.S. patents in sciences and engineering.

The LSU Innovation Park has served as an incubator for new and emerging businesses since 1989. Hundreds of high-profile companies were first developed in the LBTC, from General Informatics, founded in 2001 and one of the fastest growing managed IT service providers in the southeast, to the recently launched tech start-up, Mallard Bay, a VRBO-like booking service for hunting and fishing expeditions.

It's not the only significant business hub in Baton Rouge. Building on its 30-year history as an incubator for high growth-potential tech companies, Nexus Louisiana's Tech Park has a fleet of programs and partnerships that aim to

inject coaching, capital and connections into new businesses, says Management Consultant Calvin Mills.

"We help tech-enabled companies and other companies outside of the tech industry, to find the resources they need to be successful and bankable," he says. "We have a great focus on being a hub and support system for entrepreneurs."

Along with affordable space in its incubator for startup tech companies, Nexus Louisiana offers a variety of programs that fulfill its mission of

connecting owners with the resources to accelerate their businesses.

Innovation Catalyst, a spinoff of NexusLA, is a nonprofit venture development organization that accelerates the growth of early-stage businesses with an infusion of capital. And the Red Stick Angel Network, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Innovation Catalyst, includes angel investors eager to vet, fund and grow early-stage companies based in Louisiana. Knapp says these are examples of increased opportunities for capital investment in Greater Baton Rouge.

Back at FOODii, a wide variety of culinary startups get the leg up they need to become the next great sports drink, spice mixture or hot sauce. Hanley's Foods is one of 39 current tenants, and there are about 10 more early-stage producers on deck, says executive director Gaye Sandoz. The incubator provides culinary entrepreneurs access to a commercial kitchen and a year-old bottling facility that can produce runs of 25,000 bottles daily.

"In 2021, the incubator's tenants produced 140 tons of culinary products, and it's on pace to nearly double that by the end of this year," Sandoz says.

And it's not just production space. Sandoz provides assistance on both business development and product development, while FOODii's team of LSU food scientists help tenants create recipe formulas that allow them to bring their products to scale. They also provide nutrition labeling.

"The resources have been incredible," says Hanley, "It's really allowed us to keep innovating."

*"The truth is ... we have a climate of ambition and a real drive to find opportunities for entrepreneurial success."*

*— Adam Knapp, BRAC President and CEO*



# INNOVATION CORRIDOR

*Greater Baton Rouge has a long history of entrepreneurship, with small businesses serving as the backbone of the local economy. But resources for entrepreneurs weren't always easy to navigate. A new atmosphere of clarity and collaboration has emerged in the Capital Region with many organizations devoted to helping entrepreneurs propel their ideas to the next level.*



## NEXUS LOUISIANA

Nexus Louisiana is a Baton Rouge-based 501(c)3 nonprofit that provides high-potential companies the coaching, capital and connections they need to accelerate their growth. The Louisiana Technology Park, a subsidiary of NexusLA, serves as a launchpad for entrepreneurs at the forefront of innovation and a hub of technology development in Louisiana. 225.218.0001 | [nexusla.org](https://nexusla.org)

## BATON ROUGE AREA CHAMBER (BRAC)

The Baton Rouge Area Chamber represents the nine-parish Capital Region of Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, West Baton Rouge and West Feliciana Parishes. BRAC's strategic goals are to bolster the region's talent pipeline, diversify its industry base and job opportunities, create a more inclusive economy and enhance the region's livability. Its work is funded by businesses in the Capital Region that choose to invest in the organization either annually or in five-year commitments. Under its goal to diversify its industry base and job opportunities, in early 2022, BRAC launched a small business services program which helps business owners get connected to resources, information, and networks to grow. 225.381.7125 | [brac.org](https://brac.org)





## LSU OFFICE OF INNOVATION & ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

A number of LSU departments are now aligned under a new organizational structure that provides entrepreneurs and companies with the right environment and tools to help launch and grow their businesses and ideas. These include LSU Innovation Park, Small Business Development Center, and the Office of Innovation & Technology Commercialization—all providing advice, solutions and access to capital and other resources under one umbrella.

225.578.7555 | [lsu.edu/innovationpark](https://lsu.edu/innovationpark)

## Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE SUPPORT, RESOURCES, CAPITAL, AND ADVICE

### BR HEALTH DISTRICT

A unified medical community, brought together within the bounds of a shared Health District, to enable Baton Rouge health care providers to combine their diverse strengths and compete with medical centers nationwide.

225.763.2946 | [brhealthdistrict.com](https://brhealthdistrict.com)

### BR NORTH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

A political subdivision of the state created for the purpose of developing the area within the district in order to provide for substantial economic activity and employment opportunities.

225.921.3554 | [brnedd.com](https://brnedd.com)

### BR BLACK METROPOLITAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Empowering black entrepreneurship in order to establish a stronger black community. Inspiring, developing, educating, promoting and cultivating economic success in the Greater Baton Rouge Area.

225.302.4092 | [brmbcc.org](https://brmbcc.org)

### b1BANK FOUNDATION

Supports education initiatives through scholarships and funding of programs. It also supports entrepreneurs as they navigate the startup process. Recent examples are the Louisiana Public Charter School Association Annual Conference and Young Entrepreneurs Academy.

225.248.7600 | [b1-foundation.org](https://b1-foundation.org)

### BUILD BATON ROUGE

Brings people and resources together to promote equitable investment, innovative development, and thriving communities across all of Baton Rouge.

225.387.5606 | [buildbatonrouge.org](https://buildbatonrouge.org)



# ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM *(continued)*

## EMPLOYBR

Contributes to economic growth and business expansion by ensuring the workforce system is job-driven, matching employers with skilled individuals. It provides employment and training services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. 225.355.0980 | [brla.gov/EmployBR](http://brla.gov/EmployBR)

## EBRP LIBRARY

Provides ample free resources and programs for small business owners. 225.231.3750 | [ebrpl.com](http://ebrpl.com)

## GBR INDUSTRY ALLIANCE (GBRIA)

A nonprofit, 501(c)(6) association with members and partner organizations from over 100 industrial plant facilities and over 50 industrial contractors and suppliers located in the River Parishes. 225.769.0596 | [gbria.org](http://gbria.org)

## INNOVATION CATALYST

A nonprofit venture development organization formed by community leaders to strengthen and broaden Louisiana's entrepreneurial ecosystem and drive new high-tech company formation through education, connections and capital. 225.215.2466 | [innovationcatalyst.us](http://innovationcatalyst.us)

## JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT OF GREATER BATON ROUGE

Gives young people the knowledge and skills they need to own their economic success, plan for their futures, and make smart choices in a global economy. 225.287.9439 | [batonrouge.ja.org](http://batonrouge.ja.org)

## LOUISIANA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (LED)

Cultivates jobs and economic opportunity for the people of Louisiana, helping businesses find the resources they need to make relocation and expansion a successful, profitable endeavor. 225.342.3000 | [opportunitylouisiana.com](http://opportunitylouisiana.com)

## LED SMALL AND EMERGING BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (SEBD)

Provides developmental assistance, including entrepreneurial training, marketing, computer skills, accounting, business planning, and legal and industry-specific assistance. 225.342.3000 | [opportunitylouisiana.com/small-business](http://opportunitylouisiana.com/small-business)

## LOUISIANA FUND

An early-stage venture capital fund focusing primarily on Louisiana-based life science companies. Louisiana Fund's portfolio includes pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, agritechnology, information technology and other high technology firms. 225.763.2811 | [louisianafund.com](http://louisianafund.com)

## LOUISIANA PROCUREMENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER (PTAC)

Generates employment and improves the general economy of Louisiana by assisting business firms in successfully obtaining and performing under federal, state and local government contracts. 337.482.6422 | [ptac.louisiana.edu](http://ptac.louisiana.edu)

## LOUISIANA WORKFORCE COMMISSION (LWC)

One of the country's best workforce agencies, supporting Louisiana's employers, job seekers and workforce partners to make Louisiana the best place in the country to get a job or grow a business. 225.342.3111 | [laworks.net](http://laworks.net)

## MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP OF LA. (MEPOL)

Assists Louisiana manufacturers in finding profitable new markets, navigating advanced technology solutions and recruiting and retaining a skilled and diverse workforce. 800.433.6965 | [mepol.org](http://mepol.org)

## METROMORPHOSIS

Works with nonprofit organizations and individuals to support the development of equitable processes, and equip community members with the tools and resources they need to participate in them. 225.663.2198 | [metromorphosis.net](http://metromorphosis.net)

## MINORITY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (MBDA)

An innovative, entrepreneurial-focused organization, committed to minority business enterprise and wealth creation. 225.771.4359 | [louisianambdacenter.com](http://louisianambdacenter.com)

## RED STICK ANGELS

A wholly owned subsidiary of Innovation Catalyst Inc., a nonprofit venture development organization whose mission is to accelerate the growth of early-stage innovative businesses into venture-ready companies.

Its investors are accredited investors, or "Angels," in the Greater Baton Rouge area. [redstickangels.org](http://redstickangels.org)

## SCORE

Provides free business advice, training, templates and tools to those desiring to start up a new small business or to assist existing small businesses in improving their profitability. 504.589.2356 | [batonrougearea.score.org](http://batonrougearea.score.org)

## SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER (SBDC)

Delivers professional, high-quality, individualized business advice and technical assistance to existing small businesses and pre-venture entrepreneurs. 225.771.2891 | [louisianasbdc.org](http://louisianasbdc.org)

## TIGER VENTURES

An equity-free student-run accelerator providing LSU entrepreneurs community, resources, and guidance. [info@tigerventures.org](mailto:info@tigerventures.org) | [tigerventures.org](http://tigerventures.org)

## TRUFUND

Fosters economic development in underserved communities and among disadvantaged populations. 504.293.5550 | [trufund.org](http://trufund.org)

## YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS ACADEMY (YEA)

Teaches students in grades 6-12 to generate business ideas, conduct market research, write business plans, pitch to a panel of investors, and launch their very own companies. 225.325.3558 | [yeausa.org](http://yeausa.org)



# GETTING CONNECTED

## COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

### BRAC'S DRIVE MINORITY BUSINESS ACCELERATOR

Provides minority business owners with the knowledge, resources, and networks necessary for success.  
225.381.7125 | [brac.org/drive](http://brac.org/drive)

### BRAC SMALL BUSINESS SERVICES

Dedicated staff help small businesses get connected to resources, information and networks to grow.  
225.381.7125 | [brac.org](http://brac.org)

### BATON ROUGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP WEEK (BREW)

Organized by NexusLA, this entrepreneurship event brings together founders, creatives, innovators, investors, and business experts for a week of celebration, education, and connection.  
225.218.0001 | [celebratebrew.com](http://celebratebrew.com)

### BATON ROUGE PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM (BRPOP)

A vehicle for public entities and private businesses to bring intentionality and focus that enhances diversity and inclusive practices to their procurement of goods and services from area vendors.  
225.663.2198 | [metromorphosis.net](http://metromorphosis.net)

### LAUNCHBR

Supports local companies, woman-owned, veteran-owned and minority-owned businesses through coaching and training that is free or low-cost.  
225.663.2198 | [launchbr.com](http://launchbr.com)

### LED CEO ROUNDTABLE (INVITATION ONLY)

Key decision makers from small businesses meet to explore business and personal issues with experienced facilitators.  
[opportunitylouisiana.com/CEO-Roundtables](http://opportunitylouisiana.com/CEO-Roundtables)

### LSBDC TRAINING CLASSES

No-cost confidential business consulting and affordable workshops for existing business owners and entrepreneurs.

225.771.2891 | 225.578.4842 | [louisianasbdc.org](http://louisianasbdc.org)

### LSU AGCENTER FOODII

Helps budding entrepreneurs establish and develop emerging food ventures, including bringing food companies to market.  
225.578.5207 | [nfs.lsu.edu](http://nfs.lsu.edu)

### LSU BOOTCAMP FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Intense, hands-on exposure to the fundamentals of launching and growing a successful venture. Taught by faculty, subject matter experts and local entrepreneurs.  
[lsu.edu](http://lsu.edu)

### LSU I-CORPS SITES PROGRAM

Supports LSU faculty, staff, and students to commercialize their technologies and ideas through critical market and commercialization evaluations.  
[lsu.edu/innovation/ICorps](http://lsu.edu/innovation/ICorps)

### LSU PROGRAM FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF VETERINARY EDUCATION EQUIVALENCE (PAVE)

The pathway for veterinarians who are graduates of international, non-accredited veterinary programs, to practice in the U.S. and Canada.  
[lsu.edu/vetmed/pave](http://lsu.edu/vetmed/pave)

### LSU STUDENT VENTURE CHALLENGE

A system-wide business plan competition open to all on-campus LSU students and alumni (graduated within the last year) who are operating businesses or launching new ventures.  
225.578.0313 | [lsu.edu](http://lsu.edu)

### NEXUSLA'S BIZTECH CHALLENGE™

Offered by NexusLA, this is a STEM-based business competition for HBCU students to validate and build their business idea, and win up to \$10,000.  
225.218.0001 | [biztechchallenge.com](http://biztechchallenge.com)



Rishi Vaish, chief technology officer and VP for IBM's artificial intelligence applications, speaks at a recent TEC Next conference.

DON KADAR

### NEXUSLA'S DEMO DAY (PUBLIC EVENT)

Graduates of NexusLA's Ignition program show off what they've learned and pitch to win a \$10,000 investment prize funded by Innovation Catalyst.  
[nexusla.org/events/ignition](http://nexusla.org/events/ignition)

### NEXUSLA'S HIGH STAKES PITCH COMPETITION

Promising startups can pitch to win a \$100,000 investment prize to propel their businesses to the next level. Funded by Innovation Catalyst & Red Stick Angels.  
[nexusla.org](http://nexusla.org)

### NEXUSLA'S IGNITION 1.0 & 2.0

Guides entrepreneurs through the customer discovery and commercialization process.  
222.218.0001 | [nexusla.org/ignition](http://nexusla.org/ignition)

### NEXUSLA'S PITCH BR

Quarterly pitch competition that helps emerging companies get feedback before engaging with the investment community.  
[nexusla.org/pitchbr](http://nexusla.org/pitchbr)

### NEXUSLA'S TECH PARK ACADEMY

Workshop series that helps entrepreneurs tackle business issues such as building strong teams, understanding customers, presenting effectively, and more.  
[nexusla.org](http://nexusla.org)

### NEXUSLA'S VENTURE CAPITAL APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM (VCAP)

Apprenticeship program offered by NexusLA and LSU that gives finance students practical experience by pairing them with participating companies.  
225.218.0001 | [nexusla.org](http://nexusla.org)

### ONESOURCE

Coordinated by NexusLA, helps aspiring startups and established businesses in the Capital Region find the resources to start, scale or accelerate.  
833.964.1492 | [onesourcela.com](http://onesourcela.com)

### STARTUP GRIND

Provides startups with the education and opportunities they need to build, grow and scale their companies. Local events can be found online.  
[startupgrind.com](http://startupgrind.com)

### TECHSTARS STARTUP WEEKEND

Three-day program where aspiring entrepreneurs experience startup life.  
[techstars.com](http://techstars.com)

### TEC NEXT

Technology & Energy Conference hosted by industry technology leaders from La. manufacturing companies.  
225.328.8826 | [tec-next.org](http://tec-next.org)

## GETTING SCHOOLED

College and university programs and resources for entrepreneurs

### LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

LSU E.J. Ourso College of Business:  
225.578.3211 | [lsu.edu/business](http://lsu.edu/business)

LSU Stephenson Entrepreneurship Institute: 225.578.3211 | [lsu.edu/business/sdeis](http://lsu.edu/business/sdeis)

LSU Student Incubator:  
225.578.7555 | [lsu.edu/innovation-park/student-services](http://lsu.edu/innovation-park/student-services)

### SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY AND A&M COLLEGE

Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center:  
225.771.2242 | [suagcenter.com](http://suagcenter.com)

EDA University Center for Economic Development:  
225.771.5640  
[subruniversitycenter.org](http://subruniversitycenter.org)

### COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Baton Rouge Community College:  
225.216.8000 | [mybrcc.edu](http://mybrcc.edu)

Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University (FranU):  
225.526.1700 | [franu.edu](http://franu.edu)

River Parishes Community College: 225.743.8500 | [rpcc.edu](http://rpcc.edu)



# SUCCESS STORIES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JORDAN HEFLER

## KATHY HU

Still just a junior at the Episcopal School of Baton Rouge, Kathy Hu already has a leg up on the competition, thanks to the Young Entrepreneurs Academy of Baton Rouge. Through the program, hosted at LSU's business school, Hu, 16, conceptualized Bookmarked, a social network designed around virtual book clubs.

Attending the eight-month program as a sophomore, Hu said its network of resources helped her hone her idea celebrating her passion for reading into a fully functioning app that will include rewards and a social media interface to connect people with others who share a passion for reading.

"Bookmarked is not actually a developed website yet because I'm working on making a minimal viable product and I'm currently contacting other people in order to see if I can get my website rolling," Hu said.

The Young Entrepreneurs Academy provided Hu and her peers, ranging from middle school to high school students, with multiple mentors and resources to refine ideas into potential businesses. One of the resources she was provided as part of the program was access to the technology necessary to craft a mock-up of her website, as well as learning how to make a press release and file her business with the Secretary of State.

At the end of the program in April, the class, which provides students with college credits at LSU's business school, presented their projects and business ideas to a panel of judges. In addition to learning skills to manage a business and craft a proposal, Hu said the program also taught public speaking and confidence to the young entrepreneurs while expanding their network.

"The thing I took away most was how important a community and network is," Hu said. "I had an 'aha moment' where I realized that having a network is important, especially if you want to connect with a lot of individuals and succeed in having a business."

A SOCIAL NETWORK  
DESIGNED AROUND  
VIRTUAL BOOK CLUBS



# PADMA VATSAVAI

TELLING STORIES  
USING DATA

As founder and CEO of software company Vinformatix, Padma Vatsavai brings 25 years of experience to a relatively untapped software development industry in Baton Rouge. Designing custom web and mobile applications for companies big and small, Vinformatix seeks to create forward-thinking and intuitive solutions to every client's unique needs.

"We tell stories using data," she said. "Vinformatix leverages data analytics and business intelligence techniques to transform this data into meaningful sites to assist our clients in fostering an environment of data-driven decision making."

Moving to Baton Rouge in 1999 from Cleveland after receiving a master's degree in computer science from Cleveland State University, Vatsavai started Vinformatix in 2008 with the goal of changing the tech landscape, starting at the smallest level. The company emerged from LSU Innovation Park.

Vatsavai currently lives in Baton Rouge with her physician husband and their three children, a son at Baton Rouge High

School and two daughters, one an LSU alum and another attending school in Berkley, California.

Taking a pay cut with little initial opportunities in Baton Rouge, she is determined to change the stigma she has perceived of Baton Rouge as behind the times in the tech sphere, hoping to become a competitive employer in the area's growing tech sector that takes pride in delivering quality services.

"That is really what led me to start a business, to just have more businesses, help recruit talent that's available in Baton Rouge, to help boost our local economy, to help any way possible to change perception," she said.

Vatsavai is also working to get federal dollars into Baton Rouge to boost the economy. Currently, Vinformatix holds three federal contracts, and Vatsavai hopes this will help grow the company and the city's footprint in the federal marketplace. "I'm driven to help the community, to elevate the community, to advance the community by providing opportunities to the talent that's available here."



# CRAIG GEHRING



Despite never attending college himself, Craig Gehring, founder and CEO of standardized test prep company MasteryPrep, wants to see students, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds, succeed when they take the ACT and SAT.

"We are here to serve the students who can't access traditional test preparation," Gehring said. "We're here to help students who come from [lower] income backgrounds, who might be a first generation college student, and we help them get the scores they need to earn scholarships and go to college."

Founded in 2013 in Baton Rouge, MasteryPrep's services are free to students in 47 states and Guam through partnerships with 700 school districts. MasteryPrep, an anchor member of the Tech Park, provides schools with resources, software and curriculum to prepare students for success, filling the gaps traditional education may leave on the road to preparation for college.

Earning a perfect ACT and SAT score when he took the tests at Baton Rouge High School, Gehring began tutoring students in the different skills necessary to

improve their scores, especially to earn TOPS, Louisiana's merit scholarship program for those attending the state's public universities.

"I learned that the skills you needed to get to a 21 [the TOPS minimum for the ACT at the time] were very different than traditional test prep programs, which were really aimed for higher score ranges," Gehring said.

While he did not attend college, Gehring has years of experience with real-world entrepreneurship. "After high school, it was the school of hard knocks," he said. "In addition to tutoring, I started a marketing firm, Ring Marketing, which was really just myself for a long time."

How things have changed. Since eventually founding his own business, which now has about 200 employees, Gehring and MasteryPrep's service has expanded to include over 400,000 students annually. The company's next goal is to provide test prep services to 1 million students a year.

TEST-TAKING  
TIPS FOR THOSE  
ON THE ROAD  
TO COLLEGE





# EVON ROQUEMORE

With more than 20 years in the field of healthcare under her belt and 10 years managing her own outpatient clinic, Evon Roquemore has recently sought to use her clinic (Brightside or simply Bright) and expertise to solve issues and fill gaps within the local healthcare workforce.

FILLING GAPS WITHIN THE HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE

While running multiple outpatient clinics across Livingston and Washington Parishes, her newest effort seeks to solve issues of waste, fraud and abuse within the healthcare system by providing Bright's proprietary healthcare software to other providers to maximize their performance. "That's what makes us unique," she said. "We can either do it for you or we can show you how."

Roquemore also mentioned that Bright is looking to launch new software in the coming months that will help enhance the services they provide to healthcare networks. "We aim to solve healthcare workforce gaps through employee education and training using our training platform, which is called Bright University," she said. Bright also offers the Bright Fellowship program, which is partnered with LSU and Southern University to provide 18 months of employee placement support for students with an interest in the field of mental health. "Our overall goal at an enterprise level is to get people to understand the face of mental health and we have taken our experience over the last 20 years and are able to establish a standard," she said. "We really do believe we have found the right method of providing treatment while also not compromising or contributing to healthcare worker burnout."

The future looks bright for Roquemore and Bright, which is projected to become a \$10 million company within 24 months.

# CHRIS MEAUX

Chris Meaux's eggs are in quite a few baskets when it comes to his investments and entrepreneurial endeavors. The WAITR founder has left the company he helped build into one bringing in about \$200 million annually to invest in other startups, specifically around Baton Rouge.

Originally from Crowley, Louisiana, Meaux, who attended LSU, joined skilled worker marketplace Boom Nation as chairman and co-CEO. He also joined his son Logan and fellow LSU graduates' hunting and fishing marketplace Mallard Bay as an investor and chair of the board. Both companies are LSU Innovation Park tenants.

The former, which Meaux describes as a blue-collar equivalent to LinkedIn, provides a means of communication and credential management for skilled workers and potential employers.

Meaux describes Mallard Bay as a similar marketplace to Airbnb where hunting and fishing enthusiasts can connect with

AN INVESTOR IN MULTIPLE BATON ROUGE COMPANIES

companies and other outdoorsmen to plan and coordinate fishing charters and hunting trips.

Meaux is also an investor in multiple other Baton Rouge companies, including software developer Pass It Down, building on more than 25 years of experience in the tech industry, including the 2013 founding of WAITR.

"The number one thing you have to do in starting a business is make sure you have the right cofounders," Meaux said. "If you're gonna start a software company, you're gonna need a technical cofounder. In other words, someone who can do the software development, someone who can build the technical product you want to try to sell."

Meaux said he hopes that the startups he has invested in are a sign of a new ecosystem for startups in the area, with groups like Nexus and Innovation Catalyst, as well as the Louisiana Technology Park providing jumping off points for businesses like his.

"What's really exciting," he says, "is that Baton Rouge is really building a vibrant startup community."







# OUTSIDE THE BOX

Meet these local innovators who started with an idea, dreamed big, took risks, and found success!



**ANDREW MCCANDLESS,**  
Chairman and CEO, Bascom Hunter

Mechanical engineer Andrew McCandless launched his company Bascom Hunter in 2011, offering communication systems, photonic design and engineering, and neuromorphic model development. The company, a Tech Park graduate, today services the aerospace and defense industries. McCandless also serves as the chairman and founder of the SBIR Consortium, a trade organization supporting small business innovation and research.



**JASON TATE,**  
CEO, Pixel Dash Studios

Jason Tate has served as CEO and lead engineer for Baton Rouge-based video game developer Pixel Dash Studios since its founding in 2011. A software engineer with 16 years of experience, he has developed games for PC, mobile, VR and console, as well as software for Fortune 500 companies. Tate has worked on notable titles such as Road Redemption, The Mage's Tale, Wasteland 3 and The Walking Death: Last Mile. Pixel Dash is headquartered at the Tech Park.



**SANDRA MALONE,**  
VP and HR Manager, Aquaculture Systems Technology

Alongside her husband, Sandra Malone acquired Aquaculture Systems Technology (AST) in 2019. The LSU graduate wanted to continue the company's mission of creating filters that use less energy and water. AST, a former tenant of LSU Innovation Park, now fabricates large units out of stainless steel to complement its plastic and fiberglass units. Malone has also helped to develop a core engineering group supporting design, production and servicing.



**CRAIG STEVENS,**  
President, Genesis 360

Craig Stevens launched Genesis 360 in 2011 after serving for 25 years in the US Air Force and retiring as a Captain. The first jobs undertaken by the company were simple maintenance tasks like lawn care, painting and sign removals. Genesis 360 has since grown into an expanding one-stop shop for construction and maintenance, serving organizations across the country. The company's long-term goal is to become the "Amazon of maintenance, construction and IT services" for both commercial and federal clients.



**BAILEY MONET AND HARPER JULIET,**  
Founders, Posh POP Gourmet Popcorn

With the help of their mother Ebony McCallister, 12-year-old Bailey Monet and 7-year-old Harper Juliet launched Posh POP Gourmet Popcorn. The business was conceived around Christmas 2020 when the family made holiday treats to deliver to friends and family during the COVID-19 pandemic. After they were done, they popped a bag of popcorn, mixed it in a pan with their leftover ingredients and settled in for a movie. As they dug in, they realized that they had created a unique snack, and within 48 hours the business had a name and about 68 flavors.



**CODY LOUVIERE,**  
Founder, King Crow Studios

Cody Louviere is the founder of King Crow Studios, a successful digital media and virtual reality startup company headquartered at the Tech Park. Louviere started his company to make video games and adapted the technology into training simulations and experiences. King Crow Studios' training software technology has been utilized by a wide range of clients, from Fortune 100 companies to the Department of Defense.



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