

Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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