

# CHAMBER NEWS

## THE GREATER

# BEAUMONT

## CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## LobsterFest attracts more than 420 diners

Tournament draws 145 golfers

BY KEVIN KING  
BUSINESS JOURNAL EDITOR

More than 420 people attended the Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce LobsterFest Dinner Saturday, April 14 at Ford Park. Along with the golf tournament, which was held Monday, April 9 at Texas Country Club and preceded the dinner, LobsterFest is held annually.

"This was the 27th annual, so we've been doing this for quite some time," said Terri Potter, who is executive assistant to Market Basket President Skylar Thompson and co-chaired the event along with her husband, Lee, who is owner of American Air Systems.

"It's important that we do this because this is one of the larger fundraisers for the Chamber of Commerce," added Lee. "The Chamber of Commerce does a lot for this area in trying to help businesses and do everything that we can do. The Chamber also funds a youth leadership program and the Leadership Beaumont program, which is going to be in its 48th year and is one of the longest running leadership programs in the state of Texas, if not the longest. ... This is how the Chamber funds these through the year and why this event is so important."

In addition to steak, sponsored by Market Basket, and lobster, corn and



Aaron Alverson, owner of Fit Fuel, shows off a hefty plate of steak, lobster, potatoes and corn.

potatoes, prepared by Munro's cooking team and Cooks 2 Dozen, and Nothing Bundt Cakes, which sponsored the desserts, guests also enjoyed entertainment from Country, Blues, and Rock musician Tim Burge & The Reckoning with special guest Scott McGill. According to Burge's website, "Though primarily known as an 'electric guitarist,' he is equally adept at acoustic stylings as well. All the while working to further his ability on banjo, mandolin, dobro, bass, drums, and piano."

SEE LOBSTER, PAGE 24



Photos by Carol Gary



Texas Senator Eddie Lucio, of District 27, waves during an airboat ride, where he learned about environmental issues and problems with the marsh after Hurricane Harvey.

Photo courtesy of Navigating the Neches

## Navigating the Neches

First-ever event showcases importance of Golden Triangle area to Texas legislators

BY KEVIN KING  
BUSINESS JOURNAL EDITOR

The Chambers of Commerce in Beaumont, Orange and Port Arthur shared their strengths and worked harmoniously to produce an outstanding three-day event Wednesday, April 18 through Friday, April 20. "Navigating the Neches" was designed to provide visitors from Austin with information about the abundance of resources in our area. In attendance for this inaugural event included Senator Brandon Creighton of Conroe, Senator Eddie Lucio from Brownsville and Representative Dade Phelan from Beaumont. Representatives from the offices of Senator Brian Birdwell of Grandbury, Senator Robert Nichols of Jacksonville, and Senator Charles Schwertner of Georgetown were in attendance as well as designees from the offices of State Representatives Ryan Guillen of Rio Grande City, Tony Dale of Cedar Creek and the offices of Randy Weber and Brian Babin. The attendee list also included individuals from the offices of Governor Greg Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, and State Health and Human Services. Mrs. Kathleen Jackson represented the Texas Water Development Board. The hosts were delighted that so many government entities were represented testifying to the importance of this first-time ef-

fort. All three Chambers of Commerce participate in "Golden Triangle Days In Austin" during years when the legislature is in session. "Navigating the Neches" is scheduled to become a biennial opportunity for representatives to visit here when not in session.

"We usually go to them, but this time we brought them here to show them how important this region is to the whole United States," said Greater Orange Area Chamber of Commerce President Ida Schossow.

Topics germane to the event were port logistics, refining, operations, chemical manufacturing, intermodal transportation, the 842nd transportation battalion, the ready reserve fleet, strategic petroleum reserves, crude oil exports, ports, economic development, waterway commerce, channel improvement, workforce development, liquefied natural gas exports and waterway security.

"The top three things the event was designed to do was educate state lawmakers and staff, strengthen relationships and establish continuity for our outreach efforts in the State Legislature," said Payton Keith, of Harris DeVille & Associates, which represents many of the industrial projects currently underway and also those which have been built over the past 30 years in the area. "We're doing that as a unified approach and it's a regionalized

SEE NECHES, PAGE 22





effort.”

The Port of Beaumont provided the kick-off event Wednesday evening with dinner, dancing, and late day boat tours to view the Port and adjacent industry. Guests enjoyed music from Jamie Bergeron and the Kickin’ Cajuns, plenty of food and handshakes galore. It was the perfect way to welcome everyone to the waterway that gave the event its name. It was easy to see why The Port of Beaumont is the largest U.S. Strategic military out-load port, the third fastest growing port in the nation and the fifth largest U.S. port in terms of tonnage.

“Navigating the Neches was a one-of-a-kind event geared towards demonstrating the economic and strategic significance of Southeast Texas on state, national and global levels. The event was the brainchild of the Beaumont, Orange and Port Arthur Chambers of Commerce and the Port of Beaumont is grateful to have participated as the host, along with the Port of Port Arthur, of the welcome reception,” said Chris Fisher, director of the Port of Beaumont. “While we have opportunities throughout the year to visit Austin and address our elected officials, this event gave state legislators and staff members the opportunity to not only hear about the great things going on in Southeast Texas, but to see them first-hand. One of the best examples of ‘seeing is believing,’ from our perspective, has to do with Docks 2, 3, and 4, which failed due to aging infrastructure here at the Port in 2012. We can go to Austin and verbalize the need for funding of Port infrastructure projects on a state level, but until officials see why the need is so great, the information we share is not going to be as impactful as it is when you incorporate a hands-on experience. To see and hear how the rebuild of the dock will impact national security, increase port capacity by 25 percent, and create jobs in a region still recovering from Harvey really resonates with people.”

“The event was educational in nature and I think it was beneficial for our state leaders to see the positive impact industry in Southeast Texas has on the trajectory of the state economy,” said Mary Poole, chairperson of the Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce Board.

Day two offered the opportunity to kayak and go crabbing at the Sea Rim State Park. Texas Parks and Wildlife representatives provided the crabbing demonstration and state and federal wildlife representatives discussed coastal restoration efforts.

“Then they took them birding,” said Membership Director and Events at The Greater Port Arthur



Sen. Brandon Creighton (third from left) and other guests pose for a photo at the Navigating the Neches welcome reception.

Photos courtesy of Navigating the Neches

Chamber of Commerce Paige Snyder. The Golden Triangle Audubon Society led the birding part of the event, according to Darragh Castillo, Destination Management Specialist at Port Arthur Convention & Visitors Bureau.

“They had Cajun food provided by Bando’s,” Snyder said. Texas Senator Eddie Lucio, of District 27, enjoyed an airboat ride as well. “They actually took him around and showed him different environmental issues and problems they were having with the marsh and problems after the hurricane. The highlight, of course, was the boat ride showcasing all the industry giants located on the (Sabine Neches Waterway).”

Traveling on the vessel, the Texas Observer, legislators began the tour of America’s energy gateway, the Sabine-Neches Waterway.

The Sabine Neches Waterway was highlighted as the lifeline of our region and in some respects, the nation, which also shined light on the need for support, on all levels, of the deepening and widening project. Though the project is federal, it is still important to have state officials engaged in the advocacy of the project and all involved hope Navigating the Neches left them with a greater understanding of our region

and the important role it plays in keeping America competitive.

“We send LNG cargoes to 25 countries around the world and they all come from this waterway because Cheniere Energy was the only exporter in 2017, so we know that our export products are reaching markets in Southeast Asia, South America, Europe and the Middle East. They’re reaching markets around the world,” Keith said.

According to Daily Commercial News, “Texas, with export shipments of \$264.1 billion and a 17.9 percent share of the nation’s total, was the leader among U.S. states for foreign sales in 2017. The NAICS category at the top of the Lone Star State’s exports list was ‘computer and electronic products’ (\$47.0 billion), but close behind were ‘petroleum and coal products’ (\$44.0 billion), ‘chemicals’ (\$40.0 billion) and ‘oil and gas’ (\$32.0). ‘Chemicals’ exports were dominated by synthetic rubber.”

“We need that deepened so that ships won’t have to offload (in the Gulf), they can actually come down the (Sabine Neches Waterway),” said Snyder.

The waterway is also essential to national security. The Beaumont Reserve fleet and the Army’s 842nd Transportation Battalion, which is headquartered at the Port of Beaumont, use the waterway to move military vehicles, goods, soldiers and more to bases across the world. They also regularly use it for military training such as the Sealift Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercise (SEDRE).

Judge Jeff Branick proved that nobody else has a better total recall and complete command of facts and figures concerning coastal restoration.

“His rapid-fire delivery of information about the critical need for the restoration of the marshes was very convincing,” Poole said.

“We need to continue to make the case for the vital role Jefferson County plays in providing for the state’s and nation’s energy needs,” said Branick in a follow-up interview after the event. “Legislators from Lubbock, Amarillo and other parts of the state need to understand that we’re hard working people that supply most of the nation’s aviation fuel and a significant amount of its gasoline and diesel fuel, not to mention the chemicals we produce that are constituent ingredi-

**Dean Conwell, executive director of the Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau, enjoys kayaking at Sea Rim State Park. In addition to kayaking, guests enjoyed crabbing demonstrations provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife.**

Photo by Kevin King





ents for virtually every consumer product in the U.S.”

A running commentary about the links to the extensive energy pipeline system that connects to nearly every state in the country evidencing the fact that the waterway is vital for America’s military deployment and that it is critical to the nation’s security domestically and abroad was provided by representatives of the Port of Beaumont, Jefferson Energy, ExxonMobil, Phillips 66, the Sabine-Neches Navigation District, Savage Marine, Orange County, Entergy, The Port of Orange, The Golden Triangle Business Roundtable, Workforce Solutions, the Port of Port Arthur, Valero, Sempra Energy, Golden Pass LNG, Cheniere Energy and Harris DeVill & Associates. The entire trip from Sabine Pass to the Port of Beaumont was under the courteous and watchful eye of the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Department’s boat.

Thursday evening the Orange Economic Development Corporation and the Greater Orange Chamber provided a Cajun dinner, superb entertainment from Britt Godwin and Co. and a night sport clay shoot. The site for the event was the Orange County Airport that provided the lifeline for Orange County in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. The informative presentation emphasized Harvey’s impact on Orange County and the determination of the citizens, industry and the chamber to succeed in rebuilding.

“We felt like it was very important to bring state legislators and their staffers down here to not only see regionally what industry we have here, but also to show them what industry Orange County has and to talk about Lamar State College – Orange and how important that is,” said Schossow. “During Hurricane Harvey (the Orange County Airport) was the lifeline for Orange County. We were totally surrounded by water. You couldn’t get in and out. You could only get around. ... Every piece of medical equipment — all the supplies came through that airport. From that airport, military either took it out in their big trucks or people took it and boated it out.”

The legislators visit may also lead to further funds from the State to help in Hurricane Harvey rebuilding efforts in the area.

“You can hear about something or see something on TV, but when you see it firsthand — when you’re standing there talking to the superintendents of schools that were destroyed and you’re seeing the pictures of the devastation ... there’s nothing more valuable,” Schossow said.

Friday’s Healthcare Session at Lamar University gave a close-up look at the healthcare industry in the region. Experts demonstrated a variety of emergency and disaster response capabilities with close-up views of a helicopter, an ambulance and a full triage area typical of the equipment and training of area emergency responders.

One effort discussed with legislators at the event was an initiative to bring an “Ambus” to Southeast Texas.

The Ambus may be used for a variety of missions, including rehabilitation, local or regional mass casu-

alty incidents and state deployments. Rehab missions would consist of emergency/disaster incidents of an extended nature in which firefighters, paramedics and other first responders would be able to utilize the vehicle to escape the elements, rehydrate and have their vitals monitored. Local or regional mass casualty incidents would be responded to as any other 9-1-1 request for assistance since they are considered no-notice incidents, according to the Texas Emergency Medical Task Force’s website.

“We try to minimize the number of critical patients on the Ambus,” said Jon Clingaman, operations manager at Acadian Ambulance Service in Beaumont. Clingaman is participating in the effort to bring an Ambus to Southeast Texas. “The state is hopeful to provide three more this year and strategically place them in the state of Texas.”

Clingaman and other medical personnel in the area are hopeful that one of those three will land in Southeast Texas.

“You have a school bus accident, you have a Marshall Middle School incident — let’s face it if you have an explosion at a refinery — you’re not waiting for an Ambus to come out of Atascocita (currently the closest to the area) ... if one was ... here, it would be staffed and on the road in 30 minutes,” Clingaman said.

Dr. Kenneth Evans, Chancellor of Lamar University provided the keynote address with information about the education opportunities at Lamar University, the Lamar Institute of Technology, Lamar University Port Arthur, and Lamar University-Orange. Dr. Evans emphasized the outstanding cooperation between the education facilities and area industries. The session ended on a high note with a musical sendoff by the LU band, pep squad and cheer leaders.

Thousands of volunteer hours went into the planning and execution of this event. The staffs of the Beaumont, Orange and Port Arthur Chambers



**Dr. Stephen Patterson, superintendent of Orangefield ISD, shows Texas Sen. Eddie Lucio of District 27 damage Hurricane Harvey caused to Orangefield schools.**

Photo by Kevin King

worked tirelessly to provide leadership and support while local industry and businesses provided critical financial support. Sponsors include: Sabine Neches Navigation District, ExxonMobil, Port of Beaumont, Port of Port Arthur, Kirby Corporation, Entergy-Texas, Golden Pass LNG, Orange County Navigation and Port District, Cheniere Energy, Jefferson Energy, Education First Federal Credit Union, Mobiloil Credit Union, Medical Center of Southeast Texas, Sempra LNG & Midstream, Bo-Mac Contractors. Additional sponsorship included Flanagan Shipping, Port of Sabine Pass, Phillips 66, TransGlobal Solutions, The Houseman Companies, Oldcastle Materials Texas, Inc. American Valve & Hydrant Manufacturing Company, Lanier Engineering, Sabine Pilots Service, Inc. Ygrene Emergency Fund, Savage Services, Lower Neches Valley Authority. Additional sponsorship was provided by MCM Elegante, Acadian Ambulance Service, Baptist Hospitals of Southeast Texas, MidSouth Bank, Goodyear Tire & Rubber, Sabine River Authority, the City of Beaumont, Lamar University, Lamar Small Business Development and Gopher Industrial.

“It opened the eyes of the staffers,” to think about the area when Southeast Texas entities are seeking funds for projects from the State, said Anthony Theriot, director of Trade Development at the Port of Port Arthur.

“(Legislators) walked away seeing that we are the future for energy growth,” Keith said. ■

— Mary Poole, chair of the Greater Beaumont Chamber of Commerce Board, contributed to this article



**The Port of Beaumont provided the kick-off event Wednesday evening with a dinner, dancing, and late day boat tours to view the Port and adjacent industry. Guests enjoyed music from Jamie Bergeron and the Kickin’ Cajuns, plenty of food and handshakes galore.**



**Participants in Navigating the Neches pose for a group shot in front of the Texas Observer, which brought legislators on a tour of America’s energy gateway, the Sabine-Neches Waterway.** Photos courtesy of Navigating the Neches