Business ideas revive the Port of Delcambre

A web-based seafood market directory helps to revitalize the area

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Delcambre has seen its share of challenges during the past seven years. Hurricanes Rita and Ike flooded homes and businesses, leaving millions of dollars worth of damages in their wakes. The BP oil spill not only shut down most drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, but was a blow to shrimpers and fishermen as well.

But thanks to forward thinking, collaboration and vision, several business initiatives have revitalized the Port of Delcambre and its industries within the past year.

Among those efforts is Delcambre Direct, a web-based seafood market that connects shrimpers and fishermen with customers all across the country. Customers can visit the website and see profiles and contact information for shrimpers, as well as information about products, packaging and ordering.

Wendell Verret, director of the Port of Delcambre, said the idea came up as processors dwindled. Many shrimpers already sold directly to customers through word of mouth.

“We wanted to capitalize off of that existing market and make it more viable for them and bring in technology to help them boost those types of sales,” Verret said.

Now in its third year, Verret said that shrimpers would receive about $1 per pound, or less, by selling to a dock or processor, but with the direct model, they can receive $3 to $3.25 per pound.

Cheryl Granger, who helps her husband Albert Granger of Granger Seafood with their business, said she constantly fields calls from across the country from people who have found them on the website.

“The shrimpers need help to get a higher dollar for their seafood, and customers in turn can get the freshest product available,” Granger said. “It’s just a win-win situation all around. We get calls from Missouri, Mississippi, Kansas. They will drive all the way down here to get their seafood and pack their freezers with it.”

The online market is just one component of the revitalization in Delcambre. In and around the port itself are a new boat ramp, new docks, a new pavilion for seafood sales, a four-stall boat landing and a 28-boat marina. Jim Wiggins, part of a steering committee that has been working for the past few years to come up with revitalization ideas, said the vision was there before funding was even available.

“We just started drawing up plans, and if some money came up, we actually had direction,” Wiggins said. “I think that is what helped us, the fact that we had a business plan.”

Funding has since been provided through federal and state grants and recovery dollars, as well as an ad valorem tax for the Port of Delcambre district.

Verret said the approach has been a multi-tiered one, with projects geared toward both the business and the recreational markets. A key part of the
recreational approach is the new marina. "We put together a presentation of what we thought was Delcambre's greatest assets, and one of those was our proximity to the Gulf and the Lafayette community and the nature of that market as a recreational boating market," Verret said. "It's a big market and the proximity of it to Delcambre sort of spurred the effort to also develop a recreational economy."

Wiggins said it's been rewarding to see the steering committee's work and ideas actually come to fruition and credited local governmental leaders and port officials with providing support and direction.

Earlier this year, the port and those involved received awards from the Lafayette and Iberia chambers of commerce for their efforts, and Verret said the Delcambre program has become a model for other places looking to create a waterfront-based economy.

"We've had representatives from our group go to Washington, D.C., to meet with a subcommittee on what is working and the trend of building on the water," Verret said.

"There are similar problems in other parts of the country with losing fishermen, and so they are looking at what we are doing to attract people back into the industry and keep waterfronts as working parts of the economy."