

Collaboration drives city's economic development

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This year's Tulane Business Forum focused on growth through innovation and collaboration, and according to a panel of economic development officials, that theme is nowhere more apparent than in the city's remarkable improvement in national business rankings ? everything from top city for IT job growth to best city for attracting people under 25 with college degrees.



Leslie Jacobs, left, talks about economic development at the Tulane Business Forum, with panel members Michael Hecht, Rodrick Miller and Chris Stelly. (Photos by Cheryl Gerber)

"These impressive rankings did not happen by accident," said Leslie Jacobs, chair of Greater New Orleans Inc. and moderator of the panel. "There is an alignment at the state, regional and local level that is unprecedented."

At the 32nd annual [forum](#) on Friday (Sept. 30), Jacobs discussed the results of that unprecedented alignment with panelists Michael Hecht, president and CEO of GNO Inc.; Rodrick Miller, president and CEO of the New Orleans Business Alliance; and

Chris Stelly, executive director, Louisiana Entertainment.

Hecht cited initiatives championed by his organization in collaboration with other agencies that have helped to improve the city's business climate. Those incentives include elimination of capital gains tax on the sale of a business, incentives for digital media companies, angel investor tax credits, a tax incentive for creating well-paying jobs and even social developments such as educational reform.



Jay Grinney, president and CEO of HealthSouth Corp., is among business leaders who addressed the forum audience.

"I know when I go back to New York, where I last worked for the Bloomberg administration, that Mayor Bloomberg now looks to New Orleans as the model for educational reform, which I think is quite extraordinary," Hecht said.

Miller noted that some of the biggest obstacles to economic development are self-imposed, such as needlessly complicated zoning and permitting laws.

Organizations like the New Orleans Business Alliance are working to make those processes more transparent.

"New Orleans is cognizant of some of those challenges, and we're working diligently to remove those obstacles," Miller said.