

United Way closes in on record \$20.4M goal

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La Grande Exécutive

## Maura Donahue

Gender doesn't stop DonahueFavret VP from climbing ladder

By Christian Moises

Associate Editor

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MAURA DONAHUE is a woman. But that's not important.

"I'm in construction but I happen to be a woman who's in construction," said Donahue, the 56-year-old vice president of business development at DonahueFavret Contractors Inc. "I'm chairman of the board of the U.S. Chamber and I happen to be a female."

She's not an in-your-face feminist, either.

"That is not who I am. I think that my gender is such a minor part of who I am in all other aspects of my life. Don't pay atten-

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## Crescent City Connection investigated by state request

Legislative audit shows CCC operations need explanation details

By Jaime Guillet

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THE CRESCENT CITY Connection Division faces an investigation to reconcile its accounting discrepancies in its 2007 legislative audit and explain unfunded road projects and missing maintenance.

New Orleans-area public officials, led by state Rep. Pat Connick, D-Marrero, called for the probe of the CCCD during the Ethics Special Session.

Connick said he has concerns CCCD officials are mismanaging funds for road projects and maintenance the agency has been assigned. It's work he said the West Bank "sorely needs," including on and off ramps on Manhattan and Barataria boulevards, extending Fourth Street on Gen. De Gaulle, landscaping and trash pick-up underneath the Westbank Expressway and consistent operation of the ferries.

Connick also cites accounting discrepancies discovered in a 2007 legislative audit as a reason for a performance audit of the CCCD. Connick and other New Orleans-area legislators passed House Resolution 13 during the state Ethics Special Session requesting the audit.

Jefferson Parish Councilman Chris Roberts said CCCD officials have consistently stonewalled requests for operational and fiscal information.

"I think the folks running the CCCD are their own biggest enemies," Roberts said. "Silence is not necessarily the answer when they're dealing with public funds. They're not a business. I support and applaud Connick's recent efforts."

CCCD officials testified Thursday before the House of Representatives Transportation Budget Subcommittee on financial operations. Testimony was not available as of press time.

David Greer, state director of performance audits, said he hopes to complete the audit "in no more than three to four months."

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# CCCD officials defend operations, deny any impropriety

PROBE

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"A performance audit looks at what took place, the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of an agency," said Greer.

The 2007 legislative audit showed \$31.3 million in CCCD revenues and \$32.6 million in expenditures during the fiscal year from July 1, 2006, to June 30, 2007. This left the CCCD with a \$1.3-million deficit.

Legislative auditors found the CCCD prepared its annual financial report inadequately in 2007 and cited nearly 10 examples, the largest being the failure to report \$3.8 million in revenue received for bridge toll violations and unpaid tolls.

Randall Paisant, CCCD assistant executive director, said the state auditor findings "were all reporting indicators" and "nothing refers to the accounting."

"We don't do the reporting down here in New Orleans," Paisant said. "It's done by the accounting section in Baton Rouge. All the findings all relate to the person that does the financial reports in Baton Rouge. Every dime that's ever been collected through tolls here has been accounted for and has been deposited properly with the trustee."

Former Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development Secretary Johnny Bradberry said in an Oct. 31 letter the \$3.8 million was not in the annual financial report "because the necessary paperwork from the CCCD was not received at the (DOTD) prior to the Aug. 31 deadline." Accountant Rosalind Thomas was assigned to the CCCD audit, according to Bradberry.

When asked why the CCCD did not provide information to the DOTD for the annual financial report, Paisant said "if the information was not received by them, it's because they did not ask for it."

Paisant said the missing \$3.8-million budget entry was a "new receivable" the CCCD has

never reported in previous years.

"It's something that should have been included in the report, and all we're saying is they're saying they didn't get it from us, and all we're saying is they didn't ask for it from us," Paisant said.

DOTD spokesman Mark Lambert said the reporting error is a "shared responsibility."

"The accounting department should have been more aggressive about requesting necessary information from the CCCD and the CCCD

## Alleged CCCD inadequacies

Legislators have called for a performance audit of the Crescent City Connection Division, a division of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, to ensure CCCD management is using toll money properly. Findings from the 2007 legislative audit on the CCCD's annual financial report include:

- Accounts receivable understated by \$3.8 million for toll violations and unpaid tolls.
- Liability for cooperative endeavors understated by \$460,310.
- Original agreement totals and expenditures for two of five contracts overstated by \$42,404.
- Unreconciled beginning fund balance from previous year resulting in a footnote adjustment of \$17,525.
- Cash and investment note disclosures inaccurately prepared. The CCCD failed to report bank account deposits per bank and the credit quality rating of its mutual fund investments.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency revenues and related operating expenditures understated by \$1,648.
- CCCD management did not establish adequate internal controls over financial reporting with written procedures for reporting amounts and adequate communication for exchanging data between its New Orleans and Baton Rouge offices.
- CCCD accounting staff inadequately trained in Office of State Reporting and Accounting Policy and Governmental Accounting Standards Board reporting requirements.
- Inadequate CCCD annual financial report to state.

Source: Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development



Cars exit the Canal Street ferry, one of the toll boats operated by the Crescent City Connection Division.

should have been more vigilant in referring information to Baton Rouge," said Lambert.

Paisant said reporting responsibilities should be returned to the CCCD but the agency is unable to hire an employee to do the work because of Gov. Bobby Jindal's state employee hiring freeze.

"The stance we took is, if we're going to be written up for it, give us control over the people who are responsible for doing this so we can have control over them because we don't right now," Paisant said.

CCCD expenditures for 2007 show \$7.2 million spent on infrastructure projects.

Complaints regarding substandard ferry operations from the nonprofit Friends of the Ferry focused on irregular ferry times and cancellations. Connick said he will consider drafting a bill to take the ferries away from

the CCCD and place them under DOTD control.

"I will not force the issue until I'm sure it would be a good call," Connick said. "But I'll be ready to go once I get the information."

Paisant denied ferries are improperly operated. He said U.S. Coast Guard regulations regarding maintenance and personnel can sometimes hold up one or more of the CCCD's six ferries.

Roberts said projects typically move faster under local control but "if the only way to get enough money is to be under DOTD then we need to explore that."

The CCCD is a division of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, which manages the Crescent City Connection and the ferries through collected toll revenues and some federal funds. None of its funding comes from the DOTD. •

# First female to lead U.S. Chamber would not quit

DONAHUE

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tion to sex, age or color — that's not who you are."

Donahue started with the Mandeville-based construction company in 1980 as a receptionist after having worked with Xerox Corp. on the South Shore for 10 years. After tiring of traveling back and forth across the lake and dealing with a shortage of day care facilities on the North Shore for her three children prompted her to move north.

She latched on at Jack Donahue Contractors, a small firm with about four employees and about \$1 million in annual volume.

"I just came on at the right time, as the company was starting to grow and things were starting to happen on the North Shore," she said. "It was just a steady growth since then."

Donahue started as a project manager's assistant, then moved on to project manager, then to office manager before taking over as vice president of business development in 1984, one year after becoming a partner with the company.

Wendy Beaver, a project engineer who's been with the company for six years, said

Donahue's contacts and community involvement make her an invaluable asset.

"She has worked herself up from project manager and now she's vice president," Beaver said. "She has a big role and obviously has had a huge impact (on the company's success)."

Four years later, she married Jack Donahue.

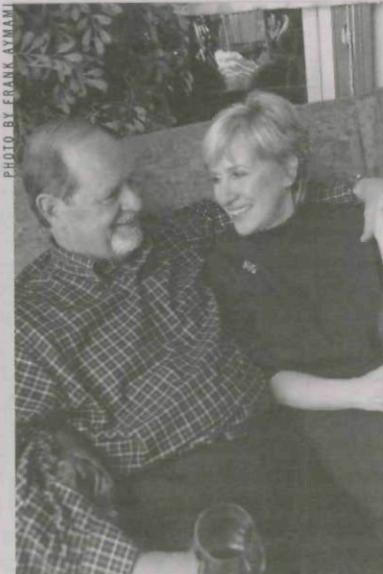
"She worked hard to get where she is," said Lacey Toledano, CEO of the St. Tammany West Chamber of Commerce. "She began developing her leadership skills as a soccer coach on her kid's team."

Donahue was familiar with the construction industry, having kept the books for a family-owned residential construction company years before, which was her initial foray into the construction industry.

To get up to speed on the commercial end, she took construction and estimating courses.

"Construction is so exciting because it's different owners, different buildings, different architects every step of the way," she said. "There's a start to them and end to them. I loved the project management side end of the business and was in the field building projects as project manager for a number of years."

She now heads the administrative end of the



Jack and Maura Donahue enjoy their Mandeville home.

business, which now pulls in about \$80 million a year, marketing company services to businesses moving and expanding in the area.

Donahue and her team made a commitment to stay post-Hurricane Katrina.

DonahueFavret, which specializes in con-

## Maura Donahue at a glance

**Position:** DonahueFavret Contractors vice president of business development

**Age:** 57

**Family:** husband, Jack; children Darrell Whitley, 38, Lance Laudun, 34, Lauren, 28; stepchildren, John Donahue III, 41, Tracy Lyle, 39, Tim Donahue, 37

**Education:** bachelor's degree in sociology, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

**Professional affiliations:** U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, St. Tammany Economic Development Foundation, North Shore Community Foundation, Blueprint Louisiana, Associated Builders and Contractors-Bayou Chapter, Resource Bank board of directors

**Civic affiliations:** Mary Queen of Peace Catholic Church, Business and Professional Women, Mandeville Republican Women, Louisiana Federation of Republican Women, National Federation of Republican Women

Source: CityBusiness staff research

struction for the retail, health care and hospitality industries, has not been pursuing work in other states.

"We're regional from Texas through

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