

Guest Column to The News-Star
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From: Mayor Jamie Mayo

When Preparation Meets Opportunity, We ALL Succeed!

Last week's announcement that IBM will bring 400 new jobs to Monroe as part of a multi-million dollar application development and innovation center has huge implications for the future growth and development of our community. We were grateful to officially welcome IBM Senior Vice President Colleen Arnold to north Louisiana. We are thankful that IBM sees great potential and opportunity here in Monroe. We look forward to their growth and presence as a strong corporate citizen. We also thank Governor Bobby Jindal, Secretary Stephen Moret and Louisiana Economic Development officials for all of their efforts to secure this transformational project for Monroe.

This is another positive development due to the expansion of both the local and national footprint of Monroe-based communications leader Centurylink. We continue to thank Centurylink CEO Glen Post for his visionary leadership. For years, Centurylink has been preparing and positioning itself to do transformational things globally and locally. Over the past few years Centurylink has grown to become the nation's 3rd largest telecommunications company, thanks to acquisitions of Embarq (2008), Qwest (2010) and Savvis (2011). Having a strong presence by another Fortune 500 company such as IBM has huge implications for the future of our community, in part, because of the ripple effect of the STEM connection.

STEM is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math education. According to the Louisiana Economic Development news release, "the IBM center will provide hundreds of new jobs for college graduates in north Louisiana in addition to new professional career options for spouses of professionals whom Centurylink recruits to Monroe. As part of the project, the State of Louisiana will provide \$4.5 million in funding over

10 years for expanded higher-education programs designed primarily to increase the number of annual computer science graduates in Northeast Louisiana. The University of Louisiana at Monroe will expand its computer science and computer information systems programs while Louisiana Tech and Grambling State University will expand their technology programs in related areas, such as cyber engineering and data analytics.” Hundreds of jobs at Centurylink and IBM will be connected to science, engineering, technology and math.

This is a sign for parents and educators that we have a great opportunity to employ exceptional students at home when they graduate from college. We can stop watching so many students go to larger cities for better job opportunities. Instead, we can watch students compete for great jobs right here in Monroe. It is wonderful that our local universities have formed a partnership with IBM and Centurylink to help produce graduates with the necessary skills, critical thinking and experience necessary to become productive members of the local workforce. Imagine how much more prepared these students will be as varieties of STEM education curriculum becomes even more utilized in our high schools and junior high schools.

According to company officials, IBM’s Application Development Innovation Center in Monroe (400 new employees) will follow the impending completion of Centurylink’s new 300,000-square foot Technology Center of Excellence (an innovation hub for 800 new employees). IBM also will partner with Centurylink on research, development and product innovation initiatives. These two industry giants could produce some of the latest and greatest technological inventions, right here in Monroe. They will serve as catalyst for continued growth and expansion of job opportunities in the fields of science, engineering, technology and math. Knowing the potential all of this presents, I would think that we would all make a stronger effort to teach our children that doing well in school just got that much cooler! I can’t wait to see the innovative and creative things they will produce. By working together, we are making a difference. Monroe is one city, with one future.