Lepage Center expands COVID-19 business resources

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In a significant expansion of its mentorship and business support efforts in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Tulane University's A. B. Freeman School of Business has announced that Freeman students are now being appointed to serve as strategic advisors to small businesses in the Greater New Orleans area.

Made possible through a special gift from Albert Lepage, this expanded initiative will provide paid positions to full-time undergraduate and graduate students working directly with local entrepreneurs. This opportunity will also be available to recent graduates who have had job offers delayed or rescinded or who have otherwise been adversely affected by the current job market.

Strategic advisors will be assigned to work at businesses for up to 10 weeks providing immediate support based on each business's specific needs. This highly qualified group of students will work virtually on a full-time basis and may serve individually or in teams of up to three based on the nature and scope of work that the business requires. Student applications are currently open until May 11.

"New Orleans' businesses are being forced to quickly adapt, frequently with a reduced team, and many do not have the resources available to assist them through these times," said Rob Lalka, executive director of the Lepage Center. "By expanding our mentorship programming in this way, we can address this unfortunate reality directly and meaningfully. This effort will provide New Orleans businesses with critical assistance — at no cost to them, which is so needed right now — while also giving students a unique opportunity to make a real contribution and gain valuable experience that will benefit them throughout the rest of their career."

The Lepage Center plans to identify companies from among those that responded to the Greater New Orleans Startup Report as well as those recommended by the City of New Orleans, Greater New Orleans Inc., the New Orleans Business Alliance and over 20 other partners currently referring businesses to the Lepage Center for mentorship. After evaluating the businesses' pressing needs, students will be matched based on how their backgrounds, education and skills can best assist the companies. Company applications will open in early May.

"In the months and years following Hurricane Katrina, we saw the impact that universities, and the talent they produce, can have on economic recovery," said Ira Solomon, Freeman School dean. "When Albert Lepage named the Lepage Center he emphasized the importance of bringing valuable resources to the business community. The Lepage Center has pursued this mission since its inception, and there is no better time to reinforce that commitment. We are grateful to Albert Lepage for his support of this important work."

For more information about these and other Lepage Center programs, contact Emily Egan, director of strategic initiatives, at **eegan@tulane.edu** or 504-865-5462.