LEAP fellow helps NOLA entrepreneur build a better bottom line

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Luis Saab (MBA ’25) talks business with New Orleans entrepreneur Travis Banks (right). As a LEAP fellow, Saab created a tailor-made financial quote tracking model for Banks' company, Gravel Road Builders and Construction Services.

When Luis Saab (MBA ’25) arrived on Tulane’s campus as a first-year MBA student, he discovered a thriving business community that he was eager to be a part of.

“I saw so many opportunities for development,” says Saab, a native of Colombia. “From hospitality to sports, there are so many entrepreneurs here with innovative ideas, and I wanted to help out.”

His desire to get involved led Saab to the Lepage Entrepreneurial Assistance Program (LEAP), a program of the Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and

Innovation that connects Tulane MBA students with local entrepreneurs seeking consulting services. The program provides tailored assistance to businesses at every stage of development, from pre-revenue startups to growth-stage companies. LEAP fellows assist founders with a range of projects, from marketing campaigns and strategy development to financial planning and product launches.

“While I was at Tulane, I was fortunate to receive significant support for my education, so I wanted to do something to give back,” Saab says. “As a LEAP fellow, I was really excited to provide a consulting framework to help local business owners.”

One of those business owners was Travis Banks.

A native New Orleanian who comes from a long line of craftsmen and engineers, Banks is the principal and project manager of Gravel Road Builders and Construction Services, a full-service contracting, construction management and consulting firm. He founded the company in 2016, naming the business after the road in Pointe Coupée Parish where his ancestors lived and worked for generations.

Today, Banks is a one-man operation responsible for all Gravel Road’s building projects, which have included greenhouses, churches, ramps for students with disabilities and even replicas of the cabins his ancestors lived in.

Business is booming, but Banks says running the company by himself poses challenges.

“Typically, I bid on 10 projects a month, but because doing the financials is so complicated, I end up crunching numbers all day and lose some of those bids. I was missing opportunities,” Banks says.

Banks wanted a way to streamline his financial management system so he could take on more projects and increase his profit margins.

Saab was ready to help.

Drawing on his skills in advanced spreadsheet modeling, he created a tailor-made financial quote tracking model for Banks.

Saab’s model automates the creation, storage, and management of quote data in Excel using Visual Basic. This system ensures that each quote is captured sequentially and stored in a library for future reference, while also preparing the

system for the next quote entry without manual reset.

“The tool I built does rapid calculations like gross margin, net income and profit for each project at Gravel Road. It’s also customizable and can grow with Travis’ company,” Saab says. “It’s completely designed for his specific needs.”

He also integrated additional features into Bank’s management system, including a business modeling tool that enables forecasting of financial information based on historic data.

“Data is valuable. Data is money,” Saab says. “I didn’t want Travis to lose any information about past contracts, so I created a way to manage his data and get some insights for financial forecasting. This process is crucial for businesses to anticipate revenue, manage expenditure and track profitability over time.”

Banks was delighted with the result.

“Luis’ software solved all my problems,” he says. “He designed a system so I could plug in my information and keep track of my numbers. The software not only helps me store my data, but it helps me estimate the costs of various projects. That way, I can be more profitable.

“My accountant loves me now,” he laughs.

Banks says Saab helped him see the company in a new light.

“When you’re working on the inside, sometimes you can’t see all the problems by yourself,” he says. “Sometimes you need someone with a different perspective to come at the problem.”

And from Saab’s perspective, it was a valuable experience for both parties.

“Being a LEAP fellow was a wonderful opportunity,” he says. “I was able to apply my background in project management and product development, my genuine passion for data management, and the skills I acquired while getting my MBA here at Freeman in a hands-on way.

“Plus, it’s great to see a happy entrepreneur at the end of the project.”