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## Le Grand Executif: Bill Hines

by Terry O'Connor  
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By Terry O'Connor Editor

He's a speed-talking corporate lawyer deluxe for the largest New Orleans-based firm. He's ranked nationally by the Best Lawyers in America in three different categories.

He's also a 47-year-old family man who is still coming to grips with the death of his father in 2001.

But he's best known these days for his high-profile role in revolutionizing economic development in New Orleans.

His name is Bill Hines. New Orleans is his city.

"I really love New Orleans and Louisiana and really do think it's a great, neat place," Hines said. "The only reason I wouldn't live here would be, literally, if I could not earn a living I found acceptable."

In the past five years, Hines has made it his mission to help improve the quality of life in the Crescent City. He wants everyone who wants to make a living in New Orleans to be able to do so.

"I see Bill Hines as one of the leading economic development catalysts in this state," said Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco. "Ever since I've known Bill he's had a very clear vision he's wanted to accomplish. He's working against great odds because we've had a meltdown in terms of business success, especially in the New Orleans region."

Hines hasn't taken this meltdown lying down, said Shirley Trusty Corey, president and chief executive of the New Orleans Arts Council.

"I'm reminded about a story about Winston Churchill, who used to send notes saying 'Action Now,'" Corey said. "To me that's Bill Hines. Do it now. Don't wait for opposition. Don't wait for obstacles. Just plow through and do it."

Hines' civic rise has been meteoric. He joined the Greater New Orleans Regional



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Chamber of Commerce and MetroVision in 1999 as a board member. He was named to GNORCC's Executive Committee the following year and became MetroVision's chairman in 2001.

Now, as chairman of the Greater New Orleans Inc. board of directors, Hines works with New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin to develop regional consensus on how to rev the region's economic engine. The mayor said it pains both of them to watch their city in a state of decline.

"The guy is pretty consistent," Nagin said of Hines. "He's fairly fearless and does not shy away from the tough issues. So we're putting ourselves on the line."

Gary Ostroske, president of the Greater New Orleans United Way, worked with Hines this year as he chaired a difficult fund-raising campaign. United Way expects to meet the 2003 goal of \$18.86 million although it remains \$300,000 short. The campaign officially concludes March 31.

"There are two kinds of people," Ostroske said. "People who make the hard things look easy and people who make the easy look hard. He's one of the ones who makes the hard things look easy."

Hines has been in the middle of most of the heavy lifting recently in the New Orleans business arena. He was:

" an integral part of the team that helped reverse Northrop Grumman's move toward reducing its New Orleans workforce.

" personally credited by George Shinn, majority owner of the New Orleans Hornets, for helping land the National Basketball Association franchise.

" a pivotal member of the economic development reorganization team that created Greater New Orleans Inc.

" a 2003 chairman for the United Way fund-raising drive, which overcame major management personnel reductions in the pivotal oil and gas industry.

"I personally think the world of him, not only as a professional but as a person," Shinn said. "It's obvious he believes in New Orleans and believes in this market."

Tim Coulon, former Jefferson Parish president and now a lobbyist at the Adams & Reese law firm in New Orleans, said Hines ignored New Orleans naysayers to enter the public arena full bore about five years ago in working with a number of civic organizations. Coulon warned Hines it wouldn't be easy.

"I cautioned Bill when he stepped up as he did that there would be those who would try to determine his agenda," Coulon said. "Of course, he didn't have one except for raising the perception of New Orleans as a region and a good place to live."

Coulon said Hines is expert at reversing the long-held negative views New Orleanians hold of themselves and their home.

"We're very hard on ourselves as a community and a region as a whole," Coulon said. "Yes, we have issues but we have far more positives than negatives. And I think Bill is trying to exemplify that."

There was a time when Hines was content to excel at the New Orleans law firm of Jones, Walker, Waechter, Poitevent, Carrere & Denegre where he made partner in 1987 just four years after being hired. The Hines workload in those days remains legendary.

"In my opinion he's one of the best commercial lawyers in the country," said Christian

Johnsen, managing partner of the Jones Walker Washington office.

Hines said he used to work 12 billable hours per day. Hines billed a fantastic number of hours ranging from 2,500 to 2,800 annually by his own estimates. In his top year, he rang up nearly 3,000 billable hours, which comes to an average of nearly 58 hours a week.

"Maybe I was a true workaholic on my legal practice until about three or four years ago," Hines said.

Best Lawyers in America still lists Hines among the nation's elite in banking, securities and real estate law. His energy and people skills rank as his top talents, Coulon said.

"You have some tremendous egos in the business community and among the elected officials," Coulon said. "His ability to bring us together and focus on what's good for the community is probably his single most global achievement."

When Hines started to "immerse himself" in civic activities, the results weren't always what he wanted. First, the Vancouver Grizzlies chose Memphis, Tenn., over a bid from New Orleans.

"We failed with the Grizzlies," Hines said. "But if we hadn't tried with the Grizzlies we wouldn't have come back later and got the Hornets."

Hines said the Grizzlies flop helped New Orleans fine-tune its recruiting game plan by inserting hotel-motel tax revenues to plug a financial void left by the absence of an arena-naming sponsor. Then, New Orleans looked for another shot at an NBA franchise.

"You do need luck," Hines said. "And the luck we had to have there is Charlotte had to vote down the arena."

Soon after Charlotte rejected an arena Shinn had declared necessary to keeping the franchise in town, the Crescent City landed its successor to the New Orleans Jazz, the city's first NBA team.

"He once again put together a great proposal by pulling in not just the region but the state and Mississippi, too," Johnsen said. "David Stern said in his offices that, in his history as the commissioner of the NBA, this was the best presentation he's ever seen."

But trouble was brewing on another front. Northrop Grumman Ship Systems, a leading New Orleans-region employer with 6,017 workers, sent an ominous signal in the third quarter of 2001.

"We had just called Avondale in August and they gave us bad body language, real bad body language," Hines recalled. "They said they may be ready to start moving the whole operation to Mississippi."

The run of bad news reached epic proportions when the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks hit followed quickly by an even more personal loss.

"On Sept. 17, my father passed away suddenly. He just passed away in the chair," Hines said, his voice betraying emotion. "He had a stroke at 70. You say what else do you want to do? I still don't like talking about it."

The death of Billy Hines, his father, sent the son a stinging wake-up call.

"He was sort of like me," Hines said. "He was a workaholic. His workaholicism was all directed to his legal practice; he was head of Liskow & Lewis' oil and gas ... he put all of his time and energy - they say it's genetic - all into his legal practice. And he was

renowned, really very successful in that."

Hines was already becoming more involved in economic development when the death of his father affirmed his direction.

"It dawned on me that at age 70, he had made enormous contributions to the legal practice and to our family, raising and supporting us and all that," Hines said. "But he had a talent that he had never brought to bear civically and in social service. His law firm named a conference room after him and that's great.

"But when my father died, I decided ... I wanted to make other contributions to my community because it just struck me, candidly, if he died at 70, genetically, I may have 23 years left as strange as that sounds," Hines said. "I hope I have more than 23 years left."

Hines and Nagin helped rally New Orleans together to keep Avondale.

"We really fought back and put together an innovative package - we being MetroVision, JEDCO, Jefferson Parish, the state and our federal delegation - and not only kept them, I think they're going to expand," Hines said.

Hines said he simply wants to be known as someone who helped New Orleans move forward in the arenas of economic development and social services.

"I'd like to be known as a smart, hard-working honest guy who made a difference in New Orleans in a number of arenas," Hines said."

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