

# 18 Years of Impact

*A Celebration of Accomplishments Under President & CEO Michael Hecht (2008 – 2026)*

In 2008, When Michael Hecht became President & CEO of Greater New Orleans, Inc., the organization had only a few dozen investors, a depleted balance sheet, and a region still finding its footing in the shadow of Hurricane Katrina. Guided by the simple but powerful mantra of “Relationships, Relevance, Results,” Michael led GNO, Inc. through a remarkable 18-year journey – building one of the most respected economic development organizations in America while helping reshape the Greater New Orleans region’s trajectory.

The pages that follow celebrate the extraordinary accomplishments of Michael and the GNO, Inc. team across five key areas: Business Development, Public Policy, Workforce & Entrepreneurship, Communications & Brand, and Major Civic Projects. From landing some of the most impactful economic development deals in the state’s history, to leading the charge on national flood insurance reform, to overseeing preparations ahead of Super Bowl LIX — these achievements reflect not just organizational excellence, but a deep and abiding commitment to Greater New Orleans and the people who call it home.

## The Highlights

When Michael Hecht joined Greater New Orleans, Inc. in 2008, the region was at an inflection point, full of potential, hungry for leadership, and ready to prove itself to the world. Over the 18 years that followed, he helped guide the organization through an era of sustained economic growth, national recognition, and hard-won civic progress.

The results speak for themselves, in jobs created, investments secured, policies won, and shaping the region into one that competes on a national and global stage in ways that would have seemed impossible two decades ago.

## 18 Years of Impact

- Business attraction and retention wins that generated over 18,500 new jobs and \$52.9B of capital investment
- Appearing in over 6,000 local, national, and international media pieces to tell the story of the region and state
- Leading local preparations for Super Bowl LIX, called “the best ever” by Commissioner Goodell
- Landing British Airways, the first direct flight from New Orleans to Europe since 1984
- Building a national coalition to fix flood insurance, and passing the Homeowners Flood Insurance Affordability Act
- Forming the NOLA Coalition, the largest and most diverse civic coalition in New Orleans history – catalyzing a 70% reduction in violent crime
- Teaming up with the Business Council to save the Hornets (now Pelicans), and keep them in New Orleans
- Winning a \$75 million federal grant to jump-start the “all-of-the-above” clean energy revolution in Louisiana, building the Louisiana Future Energy Center and Newlab New Orleans
- GNO, Inc. being named the #1 economic development organization in the world by IEDC
- Helping, alongside The Idea Village, create the IP Building, the catalyst for New Orleans’ emergence as an innovation hub
- Forming an operational partnership with the World Trade Center of New Orleans, the oldest in the world
- Developing the Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan, a national model for urban resilience

- Launching the New Orleans Startup Fund, which has raised \$245 million in venture capital and created over 740 jobs
- Alongside regional partners, returning Avondale Shipyard to commerce after decades of dormancy
- Working with leaders statewide to keep NASA's Michoud Assembly Facility open after the Space Shuttle program ended, positioning the facility to build the largest rocket in human history

GNO, Inc. grew from a \$1.6M organization in 2008 to nearly \$8 million in annual revenue by 2023–2024, with an investor base that expanded from 91 to more than 200 members.

## **Major Civic Projects**

Among the most distinctive aspects of Michael Hecht's tenure was his willingness to step well beyond traditional economic development to take on the large, difficult civic challenges. From crisis response to public safety, from regional partnerships to hosting the world, this work has left an indelible mark on Greater New Orleans.

### **Super Bowl LIX (2024–2025)**

When Governor Jeff Landry tapped Michael Hecht as State Coordinator for Super Bowl LIX, it was a testament to two decades of demonstrated leadership. GNO, Inc. took on an extraordinarily complex coordination challenge and delivered:

- Managed 25+ state and local agencies and more than 1,000 discrete infrastructure projects, completed in under nine months
- New Orleans was ready to host the world on February 9, 2025, an outcome that had seemed unlikely just a year before
- Super Bowl LIX was declared “the best Super Bowl ever” by NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell
- The success of the Super Bowl effort led Mayor-Elect Helena Moreno to ask GNO, Inc. to help found a permanent “Infrastructure Coordinating Council” to apply this model city-wide

### **The NOLA Coalition – Transforming Public Safety (2022–Present)**

In 2022, when New Orleans was tragically the homicide capital of the United States, Michael Hecht convened the NOLA Coalition, an unusually diverse alliance of 500 civic, nonprofit, and business organizations representing tens of thousands of citizens. The results have been extraordinary:

- Violent crime declined 55% from its 2022 peak by end of 2023, twice the national rate of decline
- By end of 2024: Homicides down 51%; Shootings down 47%; Carjackings down 69%; Armed Robberies down 43%
- By mid-2025: Violent crime down 67% from peak, a stunning decline 2½ times faster than the national average
- Raised nearly \$12 million for youth services
- A majority of New Orleanians reported optimism about the city's direction for the first time in many years

### **Oil Spill Response (2010)**

When the Deepwater Horizon disaster struck in 2010, GNO, Inc. immediately mobilized by executing an economic impact study, providing direct assistance to local businesses, and fighting the drilling moratorium that threatened to extend the economic damage well beyond the spill itself. GNO, Inc., in partnership with Chevron, created the Coastal Vitality Project to support southeastern Louisiana coastal communities and provide technical assistance to companies impacted by the disaster. Specifically:

- Hosted over 225 sessions of assistance to help over 80 small businesses and individuals navigate the GCCF claims process

- Developed a Coastal Vitality Project website as a one-stop-shop for assistance
- Developed detailed research including the Gulf Permitting Index, which analyzed government data to inform public policy and educate officials, media, and the public

### **WTC Merger & Trade Leadership**

In 2022, GNO, Inc. and the World Trade Center New Orleans announced a landmark merger — preserving the WTC’s future while doubling down on GNO, Inc.’s commitment to global trade for the region. Since the merger, GNO, Inc. has welcomed dignitaries from 93 countries, including French President Emmanuel Macron, the Ukrainian parliament, Prime Minister of Montenegro Dritan Abazović, British Under Secretary of State for the Americas David Rutley, and Cote d'Ivoire National Assembly President Adama Bictogo

### **Louisiana International Terminal (2025)**

After successfully delivering Super Bowl LIX, Governor Landry immediately called on GNO, Inc. to take the lead on Louisiana’s most important infrastructure project: the Louisiana International Terminal, a \$2 billion+ port development critical to the state’s trade future. GNO, Inc. quickly unblocked legislative hurdles and moved the project forward.

### **Business Development**

At the core of GNO, Inc.’s mission is business development: attracting new companies, retaining homegrown ones, and creating well-paying jobs across the ten-parish region. Over 18 years, GNO, Inc. was materially involved in securing more than 18,500 direct jobs and over \$52 billion in capital investment.

- Globalstar – 600 jobs, \$10M investment; publicly-traded satellite phone company relocated from Silicon Valley to the GNO region and recently acquired by Amazon for \$11B
- Folgers – 600 jobs, \$69M investment; national consolidation to GNO region locations - every batch of Folger's coffee is roasted, blended, and packaged in New Orleans
- British Airways & Copa Airlines – After years of strategic recruitment, GNO, Inc. landed direct nonstop service to London (the first since 1982) and opened a new “Gateway to the Americas” route through Panama City
- GE Capital IT Center of Excellence – 300 jobs averaging \$100,000/year. GNO, Inc. played a lead role from strategy to pitching directly to GE Chairman Jeff Immelt, validating New Orleans on the global corporate stage
- DXC Technology – New Orleans prevailed over 30 other U.S. cities in an 18-month process led by GNO, Inc. to secure a Digital Transformation Center in downtown New Orleans. Originally planned for 2,000 jobs, post-COVID DXC reshaped the project to 300 current positions
- Ampirical & Medline – Together bringing nearly 1,000 new jobs to the Northshore
- Venture Global - LNG export facility in Plaquemines Parish that has become a \$40B investment and will become the largest LNG export facility built in North America
- Breeze Airways – Two years of recruitment landed the newest airline from JetBlue founder David Neeleman, adding 10 nonstop destinations from MSY and creating 260 new jobs
- IMTT Retention – Retained a multigenerational Greater New Orleans company targeted for relocation to Houston, convincing leadership to stay and grow, adding 40+ jobs at \$133,000 average salary
- H2theFuture / Green Hydrogen – GNO, Inc.-led coalition won \$75M federal Build Back Better grant for a clean hydrogen cluster in South Louisiana, one of only 4% of applicants nationwide to be selected
- Niagara Bottling – One of the nation’s leading beverage manufacturers established a \$160 million, state-of-the-art production facility near Hammond creating 70 new jobs

- Shell Deepwater HQ Retention – Retained Shell’s regional headquarters to be located in the first new office building constructed in New Orleans since 1989
- Delta Utilities – Opened their new 800 person headquarters in downtown New Orleans
- ElementUSA Announcement – \$850M investment in St. James Parish, closing out the year with over 2,000 new and retained jobs across the region

## **Public Policy**

Michael Hecht led GNO, Inc. to be far more than a deal-maker. Over the years, he built the organization into a formidable policy force at the state, federal, and even international level. From rewriting the nation’s flood insurance rules to shaping the state’s tax code, GNO, Inc.’s policy wins have generated billions in long-term economic benefit for the region.

### **Landmark State Legislation**

- Elimination of Capital Gains Tax on Business Sale (2010) – Led effort hailed as “the most important piece of job-creating legislation in 20 years” by the president of a major bank
- Digital Media Incentive (2010) – Improved Louisiana’s program to “best in class” status, directly driving tech company relocations to the GNO region
- LA GRAD Act / Higher Education Reform (2010) – Leadership role in statewide coalition to establish performance standards and new autonomy for Louisiana colleges
- MediFund (2013) – GNO, Inc.-authored legislation unanimously passed and signed into law by the Governor, creating Louisiana’s first biomedical economic development fund
- TOPS Tech Expansion (2014) – GNO, Inc.-written legislation helped make TOPS scholarships available to industry-based training providers
- Reform for Louisiana’s Future (2015) – Developed a 13-plank “blueprint” for structural tax reform, produced amid the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and a difficult fiscal environment
- Income Tax Reduction (2021) – Led the statewide campaign, unprecedented for GNO, Inc., to lower Louisiana’s personal income tax from 6% to 4.25%, with national recognition in the Wall Street Journal
- Major Tax Reform (2024) – Helped advocate for a historic reduction of Louisiana’s income tax to a flat 3%, propelling the state from 31st to 18th in national economic outlook rankings
- Insurance Reform Package (2024–2025) – Partnered with the Insurance Commissioner and LED to pass a suite of homeowners insurance reform bills, including Direct Action, Fair Claims Process, the 3-Year Rule, and Fortified Homes, earning support from Lloyd’s of London

### **National Flood Insurance – A Decade of Leadership**

Perhaps no policy effort better illustrates GNO, Inc.’s national reach than its decade-long battle to reform the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). When skyrocketing premiums threatened to devastate coastal property owners across America, GNO, Inc. stepped up as a national leader:

- 2013 – Launched the Coalition for Sustainable Flood Insurance (CSFI), which grew to 250+ members across 30+ states
- 2014 – Led the coalition to passage of bipartisan, bicameral NFIP reform legislation that saved millions of property owners in Louisiana and nationwide
- 2017 – Secured NFIP reauthorization through the 21st Century Flood Reform Act
- 2018 – Secured further NFIP extension as the coalition continued to federal advocacy
- 2023–2025 – Expanded leadership on Louisiana’s insurance affordability crisis, traveling to London to meet with Lloyd’s, supporting NFIP litigation, and testifying in front of the U.S. Senate Banking Committee
- 2026 – Advocated for multi-peril approach to insurance policy, convened a group of 100+ experts, published a white paper which resulted in the introduction of the Commission on Natural Disaster Risk Management and Insurance Act

## **Energy, Environment & Federal Policy**

- RESTORE Act (2012) – GNO, Inc. mobilized over 100 coastal business organizations to support passage of this landmark legislation, directing billions in BP oil spill proceeds to Gulf Coast restoration and economic development
- Offshore Wind & Energy Transition (2021–2022) – Led 30+ coalition including South Louisiana universities in the \$75M H<sub>2</sub>theFuture federal grant application for a green hydrogen cluster, recognized by the White House as a model energy transition strategy
- Wind Leases & Clean Energy Legislation (2022) – Helped pass enabling legislation for offshore wind leases in the Gulf
- 45V & 45Q Credit Protection (2025) – Helped preserve critical federal tax credits to grow Louisiana’s “all-of-the-above” energy sector

## **Workforce & Entrepreneurship**

Michael Hecht recognized early that winning jobs is only half the battle, and that ensuring Greater New Orleanians can access and fill those jobs is equally essential. Under his leadership, GNO, Inc. built nationally recognized workforce and entrepreneurship programs from scratch, including an initiative that Amazon chose as the model for the entire country.

### **GNOu – Building the Workforce of the Future**

GNOu was created as a demand-driven workforce development program, connecting the skills needed by GNO, Inc.-recruited employers directly to training pathways at local institutions. The results have been nationally recognized:

- GNO, Inc.’s workforce program was named “Best in Louisiana” (2015)
- Federal EDA awarded a \$950,000 three-year grant to scale GNOu (2019)
- Amazon selected GNOu as the basis for making Louisiana the first U.S. state for a full rollout of its Cloud Computing degree program (2019)
- U.S. Department of Labor awarded \$1.9M to grow the GNOu Mechatronics apprenticeship program, a first-of-its-kind, German-style apprenticeship featuring Laitram, Zatarain’s, and Elmer Candy in partnership with Delgado, Nunez, and NTCC (2019)
- Launched the Greater New Orleans Career Guide as an online resource to help students, teachers, and residents understand the jobs of the future (2019)
- GNOu continued to launch new programs through the COVID years (2020–2021), maintaining its track record of employer-led training

### **Entrepreneurship & Innovation Ecosystem**

- New Orleans Startup Fund – GNO, Inc. helped fund and launch this early-stage capital vehicle for high-growth regional companies, one that has grown into the most impactful and active fund in the region
- StartupNOLA – Launched as the new nexus of the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem, integrating the Krewe de NieuX and completing the first cohort of the HBCU Startup Internship
- Startup Noir NOLA – Launched to champion Black founders and the surrounding ecosystem in Greater New Orleans, amplifying local talent, attracting national investors, and establishing the region as a destination for Black-led startups
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystem 2.0 – Secured \$750K EDA SPRINT grant; six regional startups that GNO, Inc. had supported over the years exited in Q2 2021, generating hundreds of millions in new wealth and “proving out” the ecosystem for global investors
- Economic Mobility Matrix – Formalized paid internship partnerships with Xavier, Dillard, and SUNO for local startup placements, advancing GNO, Inc.’s commitment to inclusive economic development for all New Orleanians

- New Orleans Music Economy (NOME) Initiative (2018–2019) – Launched a new initiative to develop the economic potential of the region’s world-class music sector

## **Communications & Brand**

One of Michael’s most impactful, and often underappreciated, contributions have been changing the story of Greater New Orleans. From correcting post-Katrina misperceptions, to framing the region’s renaissance for national and global audiences, GNO, Inc. under his leadership became a master storyteller for a city and region that had something remarkable to say.

### **Earned Media & National Narrative**

- In just the first two years (2008–2010), GNO, Inc. garnered over 300 articles worth more than \$15 million in earned media value, with placements in CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Economist, Fast Company, and dozens of national trade publications
- Greater New Orleans was ranked #2 post-Recession economic performer in the USA (Brookings Institution), #4 North American City of the Future (Financial Times), and “Major Market of the Year” in the South by Southern Business & Development, tied with Nashville
- Greater New Orleans was named “Most Improved in 2011” by the Wall Street Journal’s MarketWatch, a watershed moment for the regional narrative
- GNO, Inc. helped lead marketing efforts for the 10th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina (2015) and NOLA 300, securing over 650 articles telling the story of New Orleans’ extraordinary revival
- Michael Hecht was named one of the “Ten People in the South Making a Difference” (Southern Business & Development, 2013), “Hot 100 in the USA” (National Insurance Association), “Silicon Bayou 100,” and “Top 50 Economic Developer in North America” (2014, 2016). He was also featured on the cover of the inaugural issue of Biz New Orleans magazine

### **Landmark Events & Public Engagement**

- TEDxNewOrleans – GNO, Inc. organized the first TEDx event in New Orleans to help socialize narratives around the Katrina anniversary, positioning the city as a national model for urban resilience and reinvention
- GNO, Inc. Annual Meetings – Year after year, Michael built the Annual Meeting into one of the region’s premier civic gatherings; By the 2024 meeting, celebrating GNO, Inc.’s 20th anniversary, drew 1,500 attendees
- GNOfuture – Launched a comprehensive 10-year strategic plan built from dozens of stakeholder interviews and expert input, published and re-affirmed post-pandemic as a roadmap for the region’s next decade

## **A Legacy of Relationships, Relevance, and Results**

Eighteen years is a long time, long enough to watch a region rise from crisis to national model, and to play a meaningful role in that transformation. President & CEO Michael Hecht leaves GNO, Inc. larger, stronger, more influential, and more financially secure than at any point in its history. More importantly, Greater New Orleans is now a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

The numbers tell part of the story: 18,500+ jobs, \$52 billion in investment, landmark national legislation, a flood insurance coalition spanning 35 states, and a public safety turnaround that has made national headlines. But the deeper story is about the relationships with business leaders, Governors, Senators, Mayors, community organizations, and residents across the ten-parish region. And it's about never losing sight of the mission: a thriving economy, and an excellent quality of life, *for everyone*.