Brandy Christian, COO, Port of New Orleans

Francisco Christian, CEO, NOLA Motorsports Park

With their work-life balance tipped more toward work than life in Southern California, Brandy Christian and her husband Frank knew it was time to think about a change. They wanted a family-friendly environment and a better cost of living, without sacrificing career advancement.

“We were primarily looking in the Southwest to be closer to our families,” says Brandy, who then worked for the Port of San Diego. “New Orleans was not on our radar at all, never had been.” Then she came here for business in 2014. “The people were so friendly, so proud to live here and share that with others, and of course the culture and history were a draw. Southern California has a very transient population. It’s very difficult to form a community there, despite the fact that we are both native Californians.”

A few months later, Brandy applied for the Port of New Orleans COO position. “The Port of New Orleans is very highly respected in the industry, it’s one of the biggest container and cruise ports in the world, and it is in a growth situation. It was a great chance for me professionally.” They also felt that opportunities would open for Frank in New Orleans, a hospitality industry executive.

Some months after Brandy accepted the Port of New Orleans post, Frank and their daughter joined her, followed shortly afterward by Frank’s parents and Brandy’s 20-year-old nephew. After a thorough and careful search, Frank became CEO of NOLA Motorsports Park which he has transformed into a thriving entertainment and event venue. His new post came about as the result of connections made once they were ensconced in the city.

“New Orleans is a very network-driven place,” says Brandy. “The executive positions are not obvious online, but once you find the right networking mechanism, it’s much easier, much faster to find doors opening than in Southern California. I instantly got connections through the Port and people were very willing to help and wanted to see my family succeed here.”

Of the business climate, Brandy and Frank agree on its openness to growth. “In New Orleans, people are more open to experience, creativity and leadership skills, and less interested in boxing people by industry,” Brandy says. “You really have an opportunity to make your mark, create something new. There’s an appreciation for new ideas and taking risks. We’re really happy to be here.”

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“I came for a maritime industry training and fell in love with the city: the people were so friendly, so proud to live here and share that with others. A few months later the Port of New Orleans job was advertised. There was a huge draw – the Port is very highly respected in the industry, it’s in a growth situation, and the cost of living difference from Southern California was a real positive. It was a great chance for me professionally and offered big advantages for my family.”

-Brandy Christian, COO, Port of New Orleans

“In New Orleans, people are more open to experience, creativity and leadership skills, and less interested in boxing people by industry. There’s an openness and an appreciation for new ideas and taking risks. You really have an opportunity to make your mark, create something new and grow here. As New Orleans grows in these new industries, I think we’re going to see more and more of that.”

-Brandy Christian, COO, Port of New Orleans