

## Circle Food Store secures funding, set to open at end of summer

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune](#)

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After more than seven years of frustration, false hope and dead ends, Dwayne Boudreaux this week finally lined up all the money he says he'll need to rehabilitate and reopen the Circle Food Store in the [7th Ward](#). The financing includes federal new market tax credits, federal and state historic tax credits, funds from the state Office of Community Development, \$1 million from the city's Fresh Food Retailer Initiative and \$100,000 from the city's Economic Development Fund, for a total of \$8 million.

"All the funds are now available to rebuild the store, stock it with inventory and pay for equipment," said Ben Tiller, vice president of the Berger Co., which helped guide Boudreaux through the funding process. "It's sitting in an account at First NBC. This is a reality and it's going to occur."

Construction on the 22,000 square-foot grocery store at the corner of St. Bernard and North Claiborne avenues is expected to begin next week and be completed by the end of the summer. A groundbreaking ceremony is set for Jan. 14.

Architectural plans drawn up by John Williams will leave the exterior of the store intact but will open up the interior by removing a drop ceiling; this will expose the wooden trusses and allow natural light to pour in through nearly a dozen skylights.

The McDonnel Group, the firm behind the [renovation of the Joy Theater](#), is signed on to be the general contractor.

Boudreaux approached the Berger Co. 18 months ago looking for help. He had spent the previous six years trying to secure money to resurrect his store after it took on more than five feet of water during Hurricane Katrina, but he was unable to navigate the bureaucratic maze required to fund his project.

"He was contemplating selling the store," Tiller said. "Dwayne said, 'I know how to operate a grocery store, but I don't know how to pull all these things together.'"

The Berger Co. typically doesn't provide financial consulting on third-party projects, but the firm made an exception for Boudreaux, Tiller said.

"Dwayne sat in our office and we listened to his story and what it meant to the neighborhood and it struck a tone with us. We decided to get involved for the community and to give something back."

The city [provided more than \\$1 million](#) to the project in August, but that was just one piece of the economic puzzle. The Berger Co., with the help of Williams, successfully registered the store as a federal landmark in order to qualify for the historic tax credits. Another complication was to coordinate the various funding agencies so the money came through at the same time.

"We had months of negotiations, but we finally got all parties together to sign off on all the loan documents on Christmas Eve," Tiller said.



The Circle Food Store in the 7th Ward this week secured the last of the funding needed to reopen. Construction is expected to begin in January and be completed by the end of the summer.  
*Ted Jackson / The Times-Picayune*