

Construction begins on restoration of historic Circle Food Store

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From the Mayor's Office

NEW ORLEANS, LA– At a groundbreaking event today, Mayor Mitch Landrieu, owner Dwayne Boudreaux, key partners and supporters marked the start of an \$8 million restoration of the iconic Circle Food Store, 1522 St. Bernard Avenue. The project will create an estimated 75 new jobs, many directed to residents of the Seventh Ward and the bordering Treme neighborhood.

The Circle Food Store, located at the corner of St. Bernard and North Claiborne Avenues, was incorporated in 1938 and for years provided groceries, prepared food, and services such as a pharmacy, a doctor, a dentist, a chiropractor, check cashing and banking and a place to buy school uniforms. The store was a pillar of the community before it closed after being badly damaged by flooding following Hurricane Katrina.

“The Circle Food Store was not only a full service grocery, it was a warm and welcoming community hub for generations of New Orleans residents and the first African-American owned and operated grocery store in our city,” said Mayor Landrieu. “Bringing it back is a major accomplishment, and we’ve reached this milestone because of the perseverance of Dwayne Boudreaux, who was determined to see The Circle Food Store return better than it was before. I commend him for never giving up on this iconic store.”

The total estimated cost for the Circle Food Store restoration is \$8 million, with funding from a variety of sources. The project received a \$1 million loan from the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative (FFRI), with a forgivable amount of \$500,000. In addition to the FFRI loan, the City provided a \$100,000 Economic Development Fund (EDF) grant to the project. The project also includes a \$1.7 million loan from First NBC Bank, a \$1 million “PROP” loan from the Louisiana Office of Community Development, \$2.2 million in Historic Tax Credit Equity, and \$2.2 million in New Market Tax Credit Equity.

In order to qualify for historic tax credits, Circle Food Store was successfully registered as a federal landmark in 2012.

Boudreaux, who took over the store in 1991, said, “After so many years of working to rebuild The Circle Food Store, it is wonderful to know that we’re we are beginning construction. The City’s support through the Fresh Food Retailer

Initiative and the Economic Development Fund was instrumental in helping us get to this point, and the Berger Co. provided invaluable guidance through the funding process. Now, I look forward to the day when our doors open again for customers.”

Interior renovations will bring an open, modern feel to the building. The drop ceilings have been removed to reveal wooden trusses and to allow in natural light from skylights. The building’s exterior will also receive a facelift, but the store’s distinctive curved facade and white and green color scheme will remain. The project was designed by John C. Williams Architects and the general contractor is the McDonnell Group.

Aimee Quirk, advisor to the Mayor for economic development, oversees the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative and Economic Development Fund. She said the administration is committed to creating jobs and providing access to high quality food and retail in every neighborhood of the city. “The Circle Food Store redevelopment is exciting because it will bring those jobs, it will bring fresh foods, and it will also revitalize a neighborhood that we all want to see come back. It also restores an important community institution.”

Pat Forbes, executive director of the Louisiana Office of Community Development, said, “The rehabilitation of Circle Food Store is a critical step in recovery of the Seventh Ward. Getting Circle Foods back in the neighborhood will be yet another boost to people returning and rebuilding. This project is a great example of federal, state and local governmental agencies working together with the private sector to restore our neighborhoods and fully rebuild New Orleans for all of our citizens. ”

Ashton J. Ryan Jr., President and CEO, First NBC Bank, said, “First NBC Bank is very excited to be both lender and tax credit investor in the re-opening of a great tradition in our City, the Circle Food store. We are a community bank and our focus is on the economic health and viability of our local neighborhoods. Institutions such as Circle Foods are critical to creating the infrastructure which our neighborhoods require to grow and remain vibrant and thus contribute to the overall strength of our City, which can be no more than the neighborhoods which make it up. It is indeed a great day for the 7th Ward/Treme community.”

“HOPE is proud to manage the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative and provide the financing that will help the Circle Foods Store return to serve local families and create jobs in the Seventh Ward,” said HOPE CEO Bill Bynum. “The fresh foods this neighborhood merchant provides will be one more part of what we’re doing to build healthy communities, create jobs, and stimulate economic development across New Orleans.”

John Weidman, deputy executive director of The Food Trust, said, "The return of

Circle Foods to New Orleans is like planting a flag that says 'fresh, healthy food is back!' The ripple effects include a healthier community and much-needed economic development for 7th Ward,” said The Food Trust Deputy Executive Director John Weidman. “The Food Trust applauds Mayor Landrieu, Dwayne Boudreaux of Circle Food Store, Hope Enterprise Corporation, Tulane's Prevention Research Center and all of our other partners for making this day a reality.”

District C Councilmember Kristin Gisleson Palmer said, “This is a proud and historic occasion for Circle Food Store and the residents and community of the Seventh Ward. This grocery store has and once again will be vital to my constituents in the Treme and Seventh Ward. Circle Food Store is not just a grocery store, but a symbol of all the progress we have made as a city in our ongoing recovery from Hurricane Katrina. As a supporter of the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative, I am so excited that we have been able to make this re-opening a reality.”

City Councilmember-at-Large Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson said, “I can’t wait! Circle Food Store brings back many generations of memories for that corner and tomorrow’s state-of-the-art food shopping in walkable distance for our neighborhoods.”

District A Councilmember Susan Guidry said, “The Circle Food Store has been one of our city’s most recognized landmarks for decades, its tower greeting millions of drivers on I-10, on their way into and out of the city. It was the center of the community and has been missed by all since being damaged and closed because of the federal flooding in 2005. We look forward to the day when fresh foods and community resources will again be available at the Circle Food Store.”

District B Council member LaToya Cantrell said, “For decades, the Circle Food Store served as a landmark in New Orleans where residents were not only able to buy groceries, but tend to medical needs, pick up school uniforms and greet friends and neighbors. All New Orleanians—whether they reside in Treme or the surrounding area—welcome the return of ‘The Circle’ to provide fresh food options where they are sorely needed and as a pioneer in the field of African-American business.”

District D Councilmember Cynthia Hedge-Morrell remarked, “I remember what an important part of the community this store was when I was growing up. This neighborhood has been lacking not only fresh food, but its cultural center. I’m thrilled to see this progress, and I anxiously await returning to shop.”

District E Councilmember James A. Gray II said, “Every neighborhood in New Orleans needs a full service grocery store. For decades, the Circle Food store provided not just fresh food, but a wide variety of goods and services. Thanks to

the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative, the new Circle Food Store will be a neighborhood retail anchor for decades to come.”