

Rebuilding Tradition

TWO NEW ORLEANS LANDMARKS ARE RESTORED

BY DEANN DALEY HOLCOMB

St. Augustine High School

With only 241 same-sex schools in the nation, New Orleans' St. Augustine High School is unique. Established in 1951 as a Roman Catholic school, it has served to foster the growth and education of approximately



With a \$1 million cleanup cost, restoration of St. Augustine High School included removing damaged sheet rock, mold, and wet flooring.

7,000 African-American boys, which makes it a beacon in a sea of public schools. Owned and operated by St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart, alumni include well-known politicians, famous sports figures, and business professionals.

Four days before Hurricane Katrina crashed into New Orleans, the historic St. Augustine High School dedicated its new, three-story school building, cafeteria, and band room, which The McDonnel Group had worked the last two years to complete. Located in the heart of the city, the school never had the opportunity to open.

The McDonnel Group Senior Project Manager Martin Scheve oversaw the school's storm restorations. "It was bad,"

Scheve says. "The new school building had 20 inches of water in it, and the band area and locker room had 40 inches of water in them."

Hit hard by Katrina, the school and athletic programs were shut down for the 2005-2006 school year, and The McDonnel Group began

restoration of the building in mid-October 2005.

Scheve says cleanup work was substantial. "First, we had to get rid of the damaged sheet rock and remove the mold and wet flooring," he says. "In the band room, the mold had grown up so high on the walls that it was on the ceiling. It took 90 days of demolition work."

The estimated cleanup cost was around \$1 million. The school's restoration work is estimated at approximately \$3 million. Restoration construction began in phases, and as each phase continued, hundreds of



Restoration took place in phases with hundreds of workers and contractors involved in the major construction efforts.

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The high school opened its doors in August 2006 to more than 700 young men enrolled at the school.

"It required major reconstruction, such as complete sheet rock installation, new ceiling tiles, replacement doors for existing frames, and new main electrical panels," Scheve says. "We completed work in the locker room, weight room, band area, and the chemistry and physics labs on the first floor. We installed all new electrical, flooring, room construction, just everything."

Omni Crescent Hotel

Closer to the French Quarter, a crew from The McDonnel Group worked fast and furious to restore the Omni Crescent Hotel on Gravier Street, which also was severely damaged by Katrina. With only 98 rooms, the smaller hotel remains closed as construction work continues floor by floor and room by room.

"The Omni Crescent was deeply impacted by Katrina, and the restoration is a major undertaking," says Caryn Kboundi, Vice President of Corporate Communications for Omni Hotels. "The Omni Royal Orleans is also located in the French Quarter, but it is on higher ground than the Crescent, which is located in the bottom of the city's bowl. The hurricane affected both properties, but the impact to the lower area was much more severe."

Within weeks of the hurricane, Omni Hotels hired an environmental company to clean up their affected properties, clear out debris and mold, and get them ready for restoration. Then, The McDonnel

Group stepped in to start reconstruction of the properties.

David McDonnel, Vice President of The McDonnel Group, was Project Manager for the \$3.6 million Omni Royal Orleans renovation, which is already complete and open to the public. He led the team again for the \$10 million Omni Crescent restoration and renovation.



Construction took place in every room, some of which had to be completely gutted to clear out debris and mold.

A 250-man crew worked on the Omni Crescent since mid-November 2005.

The roof of the Omni Crescent was severely damaged and torn off in places by the hurricane winds. A large amount of water entered the building and affected every floor, McDonnel says. Because of flooding, The McDonnel Group had to completely reconstruct the top floor.

Construction took place in every room and ranged from finishes to replacing the wooden doors because they were warped from the water. "We did all of the interior work and reworked existing pieces to be careful and keep the historical setting of the hotel," McDonnel says. The Omni Crescent is expected to reopen in Summer 2007.



McDonnel completed all of the interior room and back of house area work, reworking existing pieces to preserve the historical setting of the hotel.

This step may seem like a small one, but it means volumes to the overall restoration of the city of New Orleans. "New Orleans is on the rebound, and we want to be a part of that," says Kbouti. "We were committed to do what was necessary to have that property restored to the city's wants and needs." 



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