

A new use for a building steeped in

# Tradition

**G**ood works fall into many categories. There is the hand extended to heal. There is the hand extended to build. And, of course, that's just the beginning of the list.

Currently, The McDonnell Group is the general contractor on a project for Facility Planning, State of Louisiana that is providing an opportunity to support the efforts of the medical community. This is phase two of the renovation of a 16-story building that will be used for dormitory rooms at the Louisiana State University (LSU) Health Sciences Center, New Orleans.

To all casual observers, the building, which was constructed around 1924, appears much like any number of other highly functional early 20th-century buildings. But the structure embodies much history because of its ties to the Sisters of Charity, women who were instrumental in launching health care services in New Orleans and in the United States.

The story began in Paris, France in the year 1634. Meet St. Vincent de Paul, a philanthropist known for his work in finding a way to eliminate social problems, such as homelessness. It was de Paul who established the Sisters of Charity in 1634, according to *The Oxford Companion to Medicine*. Sisters of Charity got its start as a lay group and took no vows. That later changed.

The Sisters of Charity had one hundred houses in France by 1650. They cared for the sick in hospitals and in homes. Somehow they were spared during the Reign of Terror at the end of the French Revolution (July 1793 to July 1794). Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton established the Daughters of Charity, an affiliate of the Sisters of Charity, in Emmitsburg, Maryland, in the mid-19th century.

In 1859, the Daughters of Charity, which is affiliated with the Sisters of Charity, established Hotel Dieu Hospital near the site where, now stands, the building The McDonnell Group helped renovate. Today Hotel Dieu is known as University Hospital, one of the two hospitals in the LSU Health Sciences Center.

The other hospital in the LSU Health Sciences Center is Charity Hospital, which was not founded by the Sisters of Charity but rather by Jean Louis, a French seaman and merchant. When Louis founded Charity Hospital remains a matter of dispute. The date is put as early as 1720 by some sources, such as *History of Nursing in Brief* (1950).

Nevertheless, with the overlapping names of "Charity," it's easy to get off track regarding the when, where, and how of hospitals and medical care providers in New Orleans. Add to the mix the many different buildings—at least six—Charity Hospital has occupied in its nearly 300-year history, and it's particularly easy to run down the wrong path.

One thing is certain. The Daughters of Charity were instrumental in early nursing education in Louisiana, much of which took place in New Orleans. And efforts were not contained to the walls of the hospital the group founded. They helped provide the care given at Charity Hospital during the Civil War to soldiers from both armies. Their own facility, Hotel Dieu, also stayed open during the Civil War. It was the only private hospital in New Orleans to do so.



The Sisters of Charity sold Hotel Dieu to the state in 1992, and it then took its current name, University Hospital. The building which was sold to the state was not the original structure but one that was constructed in 1972. Between 1859 and 1972, there was at least one other complete rebuild of Hotel Dieu. This took place in 1924.

The building that The McDonnell Group is renovating for the LSU Health Sciences Center served nursing students in the past, and was probably built around the same time as the 1924 building that housed Hotel Dieu Hospital for almost 50 years. Now, in a nice symmetry, it will serve students gearing up for the medical professions in the future.

Because the State of Louisiana controlled the project, the contract award was made on a hard-bid process. Jason Zuckerman, project manager for The McDonnell Group, had responsibility on the firm’s part. He explains another company completed the phase-one demolition, and the state is still deliberating about the award of a phase-three contract.

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“We’re doing phase two of the four-phase project,” he says. That includes some demolition and gutting, the buildout of four floors, and the mechanical, as well as, electrical upgrades to the building. It also encompasses a complete overhaul and renovation of the original elevators.

The existing elevator machines, the hoists, are staying, says Zuckerman, not for historical reasons, but simply because they are so large they could not be removed and replaced in an economical way.

“An extremely tight schedule” characterizes the biggest challenge of the renovation project, notes Zuckerman. In addition, he explains, it is always difficult working in an existing building because of the need to fit new systems into existing structures.

Anyone who does not work in general contracting and needs a real-world example of the difficulty encountered, Zuckerman compares it to replacing a drain in the sink.

<i>Timeline</i>	
<i>Year</i>	<i>Event</i>
1634	Sisters of Charity established
1650	Sisters of Charity establish 100 houses in France
1859	Daughters of Charity establish Hotel Dieu Hospital
1924	Complete rebuild of Hotel Dieu Hospital
1972	Second complete rebuild of Hotel Dieu Hospital
1992	Hotel Dieu Hospital becomes University Hospital
2003	University Hospital renovated for dormitory rooms at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

It seems like a reasonable and easy enough thing to do. But sizes and forms of mechanical components change over time. All too often, the would-be handyman ends the job backed up to the city sewer and on the phone with a genuine plumber.

A general contractor anticipates all the problems of retrofitting in advance; then, he steadies and readies the team to tackle them. But they are still complex.

The phase-two renovation segment was a \$7.5 million job. It was completed in 240 days.

One of the key people from The McDonnell Group on the site was superintendent Gary McCann. Zuckerman, as Project Manager, credits McCann with ensuring that everything he envisioned happening, came to fruition.

When The McDonnell Group first bid on the work, it was not the low base bidder, says Allan McDonnell, president. But as the state began to consider its real costs and its needs, it reevaluated the bids with all alternates, and The McDonnell Group got the job.

The state wanted to retain the exterior of the building for historical purposes, says McDonnell. But it also wanted to recast the interior to allow for several different functions. Besides dormitory rooms, the building will house day care, wellness, and fitness centers.

The amenities make sense. The dedication of individuals who provide health care has not changed in the nearly 400 years since the Sisters of Charity were established as a group. But the demographics of those studying to enter the medical professions are quite different now. There are parents and people of all ages. It is important for them to have the support services they need close to home. Within the same building, makes it even better. •