

COMPLEX RESTORATION YIELDS BRILLIANT RESULTS

Spotlight on Metairie Country Club | By Margie Church

By this time last year, Phase I of the Metairie Country Club restoration was in high gear. With the schedule and the budget on narrow avenues, and the Club still fully operational during construction, Grayson Bultman, The McDonnell Group Project Manager, deployed all his experience and skill to help ensure the grand re-opening was truly grand.

Over the years, additions and updates were made to the Club's structures without serious consideration to the

effect the changes had on the overall aesthetics or function of the building. After Hurricane Katrina took a punch at the venerable club, its board of directors decided a complete makeover was required. They wanted to restore the original 1920's charm and appeal by unifying the architectural design and décor, as well as modernize facilities and create new spaces for members to enjoy.

First things first

The McDonnell Group closely worked with the architectural firm, Mathes Brierre, throughout the project. Value-

engineering contained costs, while still delivering the required aesthetics and safety. For example, using a hollow core concrete plank on the foundation made the foundation lighter and opened the door for cost savings on the building piles. A pre-engineered metal building, rather than one of conventional steel, made it lighter yet still in compliance with hurricane wind codes.

Digging in

In late 2007, site improvements began on the Club's new sports complex. The swimming pool and tennis courts



Reception Area

are favorite social gathering spots and important revenue-generating operations. Both were completely renovated and ready by the 2008 summer season and everyone appreciated the short disruption to their operation.

While work on the pool and tennis complex continued, the new foundations were laid for facility expansions and half of the clubhouse was partitioned off for demolishing the ballroom, main dining room, and cocktail lounge. Club members and staff coped with the inconveniences of preparing meals and dining in half of their usual dining and kitchen areas during this time.

The extent of the building's underlying problems became clear when the walls were stripped to the studs and the ceilings to the rafters. "In some areas, we had no

idea how the roofs and walls were even being held up because some of rafters and studs were cut during previous remodels. We also found unanticipated water and termite damage. The asbestos found in the basement required prompt, careful remediation," Bultman explained.

These problems impacted the budget as well as the schedule. To add more headaches to the mix, Hurricane Gustav blew ashore and the evacuations threw a two-week wrench in the plan.

To salvage the schedule, the Club's board weighed overtime labor charges against lost revenues [from a delayed reopening] and chose the overtime. "Our staff worked every single day from November 2008, until the work was finished, including Thanksgiving and Christmas," said Joseph Montalbano,

McDonnel Group Superintendent. "We didn't shut down a single day; it's all part of the job. We work with a great bunch of people, from the administrators to the nuts and bolts guys, to make it happen. They're like a family," Montalbano said.

Focus on the finish

The advent of more construction dilemmas presented new trials, but The McDonnel Group dug deeper, its focus on the grand reopening date of April 5th.

Fitting the new electromechanical systems in the new structure became the next hurdle. The new ceiling heights and the old structure couldn't accommodate the ductwork as planned. The closet spaces envisioned for mechanical storage were too small. The mechanical systems remained

» Continued on page 10



Pre-Function Room



Ballroom Hallway



Main Dining Room

unchanged, but how the HVAC system serviced the rooms radically changed. A flurry of change orders arrived daily as the architect helped Bultman and his crews cope with reality. At one point, nearly half of The McDonnell Group was working on the project to help manage all the revisions.

“It took a huge, collaborative effort among us, the architect, and the mechanical engineers to quickly communicate the barrage of multiple field instructions, to so many people involved, in an orderly manner,” Bultman said. “The changes had a trickledown effect on the subcontractors and some days we had several. We received tremendous cooperation from everyone involved.”

After New Year’s, the end was in sight but there remained much to complete. Everyone kept their shoulder to the work without fail. Many beautiful wood beams found while uncovering the ceiling were salvageable. Subcontractors

restored and reused as many of them as possible to lend authenticity to the renovation.

By early March, the final touchups and cleaning were underway. “I’m really proud of the way the finish work turned out. The finishes are A+ and definitely exceeded my expectations. I credit the team’s commitment and attention to detail for that,” Bultman explained. He also says club members are very impressed with the results and that’s what matters most.

State and local inspectors came to the Club to preview the site prior to the final inspections. These preliminary inspections helped identify problems early and head off snags that potentially could cause delays.

The Metairie Country Club held their much anticipated Easter celebration on April 5th, just as planned. They spent the next two weeks moving into their

new spaces and moving out of the old in preparation for Phase II construction, which is underway.

Lessons Learned

Bultman anticipated similar problems in the Phase II project and began working with the architects and club owners to mitigate their impact. Phase II includes remodeling the Club’s main kitchen and men’s locker room, and the addition of a women’s locker room, a men’s lounge, a men’s grill, and a family dining room. The exterior wall skins and interior finish work will come together seamlessly to restore Metairie Country Club’s southern charm for a planned Christmas celebration in December 2009.

“This is a historical restoration, without a doubt. The Metairie Country Club wanted to reinvent themselves as a prominent country club in the South. They are well on their way to accomplishing that goal,” he said.

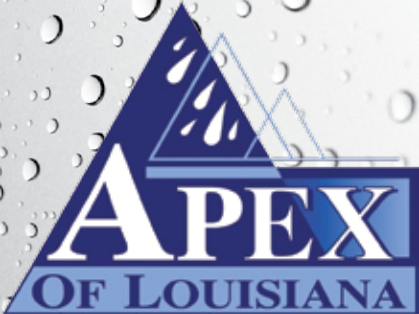


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