

HISTORIC RENOVATION

# Giving New Life

THE RENOVATION OF THE HISTORIC  
CHARITY NURSING HOSPITAL



**P**ick up a newspaper in almost any state and read the same sort of story. Revenue is falling and something must be cut. Higher education typically takes many of the first nips and tucks. Staying on track with tight budgets requires resourcefulness. College and university buildings need to be maintained, renovated, and constructed. A strategy to maximize the punch of dollars is a must.

Facility Planning of the State of Louisiana deals with budget constraints by dividing jobs into several components. When there is sufficient funding in a fiscal cycle to accomplish one component, bids are solicited. That, in short, is how The McDonnel Group garnered a \$7.7-million contract to renovate four floors of a 16-story building on the campus of the Louisiana State University (LSU) Health Sciences Center, New Orleans.

The work The McDonnel Group did was completed on August 3. Students are expected to start living in the quarters in January, or as soon as the state outfits rooms with furniture and bookshelves.

The McDonnel Group completed the second phase of a four-phase project. The project was structured in segments to make the best use of available dollars, explains Jason Zuckerman, Project Manager for The McDonnel Group.

Duplantier & Meric Architects, New Orleans, is serving as architect for all phases of the venture.

During phase II, The McDonnel Group completed demolition work on the interior of floors seven, eight, nine, and 10 and then finished the build-out. All new services, including water, electrical, heating, ventilation, and cooling were installed. Elevators were refitted and emergency systems were put in place.

Materials used were standard and reliable, such as vinyl tile and composite flooring and painted gypsum board.

## Challenges

There were many challenges on the phase II work at the LSU building. “The schedule” was perhaps the biggest one, says Zuckerman. “More than one million dollars of work a month” was completed during the seven-month project, he explained.

As many as 160 people were on site at any one time, says Zuckerman. “It’s a downtown site,” he adds, so “site logistics were difficult.

“To receive numerous materials in a downtown site” requires some careful planning, he adds. “Lay-down is difficult.”

The existing elevator machines, the hoists, were kept as part of the structure, Zuckerman says. Because they are so large they could not be removed. Sizes and forms of mechanical components change over time, and retrofitting the new to an 80-year-old structure demands special effort.

The McDonnel Group aims to anticipate all the problems of retrofitting in advance, as it steadies and readies the team to tackle them. But the effort is still complex.

One of the key people from The McDonnel Group on the site was the Superintendent, Gary McCann. Zuckerman credits McCann with ensuring that everything he envisioned happening as Project Manager did happen.

It was the second state project Zuckerman has worked on with McCann. Zuckerman says McCann has a talent for meeting the tough expectations the state has.

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Above and right: The McDonnel Group completed demolition work on the interior of floors seven, eight, nine, and 10 and then finished the build-out.



Although elements of the job were routine, there were novel approaches to some endeavors. “We took a Bobcat and lifted it up onto the top floors to take down the interior partitions,” says Zuckerman. It was a small Bobcat that could fit through a window. A material hoist was used to lift it.

### Good Reviews

“It’s been a very successful job with us in terms of consultants,” says Zuckerman. “By consultants, I mean the architects, Duplantier & Meric.”

Zuckerman says he appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with Duplantier & Meric. “The architects were a tremendous asset on the job,” he explains, “very helpful.

“Everybody seems very pleased with the job we did,” continues Zuckerman. Indeed, he explains that The McDonnell Group looks forward to bidding on the fourth phase of the work when a solicitation is released by the state, probably in November.



Allan McDonnell, President of The McDonnell Group, has also heard positive comments about the results. “They said they were really pleased not only with the time,” he says, “but also with the quality.”

The fourth phase of work will entail completion of the remaining dormitory

floors. There will be two more floors below the 10th floor made ready for housing students.


The state wanted to retain the exterior of the building for historical purposes, says McDonnell. At the same time, it aimed to recast the interior for multiple functions. Besides dorm rooms, the building is slated to 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 was 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. In the same building is even better.

### Historic Designation

Zuckerman comments that he has heard LSU is pursuing historic preservation status for the building. Records will indicate whether the edifice has sufficient significance to earn such a rating.

To casual onlookers, the building, which was probably constructed in 1924, resembles 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, an organization of women who were instrumental in launching health care services in New Orleans and in the United States.

The Charity Nursing building remains a defining feature of the LSU campus, and maintaining it is an essential responsibility. The McDonnell Group goes beyond the mere construction of new projects. They’ve preserved historic architecture while modernizing the facility for future generations of students. 



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