

REVITALIZING NEW ORLEANS' MID-CITY

Welcome, St. Margaret's Daughters Home | By Margie Church

David McDonnell, The McDonnell Group Vice President of Estimating, recalls the day The McDonnell Group (TMG) arrived on the old Mercy Hospital property in Mid-City New Orleans. Everything in the area had been damaged by Katrina, and for almost six long years, the entire block was an eyesore, a target for vandals, and an ongoing security problem to the surrounding community.

"Once the new ownership group took control of the property, we pulled up to conduct our field inspections and secure the site," McDonnell said. "We weren't there fifteen minutes when an area business owner came by to see what we were doing. We had a steady stream of visitors all the while we were patching fencing, removing graffiti, boarding low openings and welding the doors shut. When community members learned of the plans for the site, they were thrilled," he said.

Groundbreaking Concept in Senior Care

The facility The McDonnell Group will build is designed on the "household model." Nine to twelve residents, grouped by their individual needs and capabilities, will live in small, residential-style units. One unit will be designated for memory care residents.

Each pod will have its own dining area, kitchen, laundry, living room with a fireplace, spa suite, and a staff support area. The overriding goal is to allow residents to live as independently and "home-style" as possible. Support staff is there to facilitate residents' daily activities such as preparing meals, washing their clothing, and changing their bedding. Instead of bringing residents



St. Margaret's Rendering Courtesy of Blich/Knevel Architects

to the communal dining room of a traditional nursing home, for example, the daily activities are brought to them. The household model completely deinstitutionalizes nursing homes.

Manda Mountain, St. Margaret's Daughters Home VP of Operations-East, has high expectations. "What excites me most is being able to give the residents the highest quality of life possible," she said. "To be able to restore some of those activities in life that meant so much to them is tremendous. Many of our residents know how to cook and still are able. I know how much they would love to prepare a pot of gumbo. We look forward to helping them do that and more."

It will be a happy day next summer when the 116 residents living in temporary FEMA facilities can move into the new senior care facility. Clinical studies have revealed how beneficial the household model is. In this living situation, residents who are able are likely to walk to meals and feed themselves because it's reminiscent of being in their own homes. They are more interested in life and living when they can do things for themselves. Residents in the small units become an extended family to each other and their family members are welcome to visit and join in the day-to-day activities. Small dogs, cats, and birds will be welcome in the pet-friendly facility, too.

Green spaces are planned outside in the form of a central patio and atrium. Smaller, protected patios will be built for the residents, and a large outdoor area with activity space will be shared with an adjacent daycare facility. What could be better than extra grandparents and grandbabies sharing their space and time?

Inside St. Margaret's, rolling garden carts will be available for those who enjoy planting flowers, herbs or vegetables. Communal areas will give residents places to enjoy music, crafts, exercise, and events.

Preparing for Build-back

There are two contracts for St. Margaret's. The first is the demolition; the second is the build-back. The Sulzer Group evaluated contract bidders based on cost and overall qualifications to do the work. TMG was selected, having the lowest bid and the highest capabilities score.

McDonnell said two contracts were extended to expedite the completion of the overall project as there were no accurate as-built drawings of the old buildings. "A separate demolition contract allows us to get down to the bare bones of the existing structure (the old Lindy Boggs medical office building) and see what we're facing. What we're left with is ready to take the new construction." McDonnell and Ron Blich, President, Blich-Knevel Architects, say there were no surprises.

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In order to expedite the project, TMG began the test pile program during the demolition phase. Test piles are driven into the ground and evaluated to determine whether their length and size will measure up to the new building's requirements. Field engineering continues while TMG waits for the test results, which can take up to three weeks.

The McDonnell Group Superintendent Kirk Laborde, said concrete and metal were recycled as much as possible. "It wasn't required in the contract, but we've gotten in the habit of doing it," Laborde said. "We save the cost of sending concrete to the dump and put the money from metal recycling back into the project. It's a win-win."

TMG is working with the key subcontractors, building owners, engineers, and architects to further reduce the overall cost of the job. Laborde expects to have TMG's job trailer established on the site and moving forward with the new construction within a month.

Good Working Partnership Formed

"The McDonnell Group has been great to work with," said Mountain. "They've been very accommodating and have educated us about the process. We look forward to completing the project."

Blich-Knevel Architects has worked with The McDonnell group on numerous health-care projects and has a long-standing relationship with the company. "I'm happy

they were selected as the general contractor," said Blich. "We'll deliver fantastic results."

This is the second "household model" facility for Blich-Knevel; they designed another one in Biloxi, Mississippi. Blich said his firm is working with a number of clients to reconfigure their traditional nursing homes to the household model. He believes the new model is the way of the future for senior care facilities.

"St. Margaret's is one of the first mid-city projects we've been involved with since Katrina, so we're also looking forward to restoring some much-needed healthcare services," Blich said. "The community can hardly wait. Welcome to Mid-City, St. Margaret's!"

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