

# NEW ORLEANS CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

A publication from The McDonnell Group, L.L.C. • Volume 4 • Issue 1  
www.mcdonnel.com

"The aesthetics are important  
but the end result needs  
to function the way  
we live and work."

—Paul Peyronnin, Baker Donelson



**UNIFIED SPACE**  
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell  
& Berkowitz Office Renovation

## Inside This Issue

2011 KEY PROJECTS AT THE MCDONNELL GROUP  
REVITALIZING NEW ORLEANS' MID-CITY  
DRAINAGE PUMP STATION NO. 13 MADE HURRICANE-READY

# UNIFIED SPACE

## Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz Office Renovation | By Margie Church

**B**aker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz (Baker Donelson) opened its New Orleans office on February 14, 2004, with 11 attorneys, and steadily grew to 54 attorneys occupying half of the 38th floor and all of the 36th floor of Place St. Charles.

After several years of coping and compromising with cramped quarters, the firm jumped at the opportunity to take over the entire 35th floor of Place St. Charles to combine their space. Anne Leche, Baker Donelson Office Administrator, said their floor space doubled from 24,000 square feet to 48,000. However, a mixture of decorating schemes and inefficient floor layouts didn't convey the firm's image well nor make workflow smooth. Baker Donelson's partners wanted a unified workspace, reflecting its needs and personality.

The firm didn't have to look far for an architect to lead its to-the-slab renovation. Another of the building's

tenants, Mathes Brierre Architects, had previously renovated portions of Baker Donelson's offices.

"The fantastic synergy between our companies and the people involved made us eager to take on this very complicated, exciting project," said Mathes Brierre Principal in Charge, Ann Schmuelling.

When the time came to hire a general contractor, Schmuelling said the bid list was invitation-only. "We tapped contractors large enough to handle the magnitude of work. They also had to have significant interior work experience and great client skills." Mathes Brierre had previously partnered with The McDonnell Group (TMG) on several, significant corporate interior projects.

After bids came in, Baker Donelson interviewed the two lowest bidders privately," Schmuelling said. "They met with the superintendent and project manager from The McDonnell Group, and Baker Donelson hired them immediately."

### Ground Rules from the 36th Floor: Work Continues

Business as usual and a steady stream of clients made the project anything but usual. There was very little swing space (one freight elevator and two loading docks) available for staging or storing materials while the new space was created. Post-Katrina product availability and pricing, and long lead times were but a few obstacles in front of the construction team.

Troy Orgeron, TMG Superintendent, was charged with the field coordination of the subcontractors and materials. Jeffrey Proctor, TMG Assistant Project Manager, worked shoulder-to-shoulder with him on the very aggressive nine-month renovation.

Proctor said the job was broken into four phases, each with established start and completion dates. Work began on the 35th floor to demolish the space vacated by the previous tenant, while Baker Donelson conducted its business on the other half. "All the demolition occurred at night," said Proctor. "If



Main Reception Area

the work was loud or created odors, we were there off-hours or before 8 a.m." This meant Orgeron was sometimes supervising crews around the clock.

On a typical day, more than 20 trades were working hard and trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. "We'd done a lot of work in Place St. Charles before, so we knew how to get around the high rise and keep the disruption to other floor tenants to a minimum," Proctor said.

### Social Spaces for a Social Firm

One element of the renovation was a private stairwell connecting the two floors. Baker Donelson is a very social group, so the stairwell was located between the two floors near the break room. This eliminated the amount of time it takes to get from one floor to another plus; its location encourages people to gather for meals. The stair's steel legs, stringers, and treads were fabricated off-site, but had to be kept to a dimension that would fit in the freight elevator. A hole was cut in the 36th floor slab and then the stair's

steel frame was welded together during off-hours.

In keeping with the firm's penchant for gathering, the number of conference rooms was expanded from four to thirteen. Most are located to the front of the "house" now so client privacy and the confidential nature of the firm's work are preserved. The largest of these rooms seats in excess of 50. A catering kitchen with a bar, small wine cellar, and other restaurant-style accoutrements, is attached to the "cluster." Retractable walls are perfect for entertaining. The break room also has a television and a Wii, an Internet café, and several types of seating arrangements.

Fun aside, there are now more than 30 offices on each floor. Surprisingly, the entire perimeter wasn't used for attorney offices. Some were removed to allow natural lighting to flow into the core of the floor space where administrative assistants and paralegals work. The break room also is on the perimeter, something Schmuelling says is almost unheard of in law firms. "Perimeter

offices are coveted, but this Firm really cares about its quality of work life and they demonstrated it," she said.

The entire staff now has more ergonomic, Knoll work stations. A modular wall system called DIRT (Do It Right This Time) was chosen to keep the project on track and provide a high quality result after Katrina shut down many of the regional mills. DIRT systems are environmentally-friendly and very flexible. The pre-finished modules anchor into the floor and ceiling and are expandable and removable without damaging finish work. They incorporate the flat panel LED/LCD technology Baker Donelson wanted. "The legal system has changed a lot and we have a digitized environment," Leche said. "Our AV system is state of the art for video conferencing and presentations."

The work stations and DIRT systems also are veneers and required a lot of custom coloring. "We had so much team representation and lots of levels of experience making things come together aesthetically," Schmuelling



Lobby



Break Room



Conference Center



Conference Center

“

**Everyone from The McDonnell Group made us feel as though this project was very important to their company. We appreciated that and we'll miss them.**

—Anne Leche, Baker Donelson Office Administrator

”

said. "That really led this to being a successful project."

### **Excellent Effort Yields Excellent Results**

Good housekeeping practices and excellent indoor air quality were constant concerns. Indoor air quality was treated as though the renovation was a LEED project. Charcoal filters were used in negative air exchangers to absorb fumes during welding. When the firm's employees arrived the next morning, their noses couldn't detect any welding odors. Duct systems were closed and dust partitions put in place to keep the occupied areas clean.

Leche said moving people while keeping their documents and files safe so the lawyers could continue working were the biggest challenges. "We had absolutely no issues. The McDonnell Group was very responsive and on schedule. The craftsmen were really super and pleasant

to work with, too. They did a great job. Everyone from The McDonnell Group made us feel as though this project was very important to their company. We appreciated that and we'll miss them."

"When you walk into the offices, the design really speaks to their personality," said Vicki Cusimano, Mathes Brierre Project Designer. "Everything is clean, sleek, and contemporary. There's a cohesive identity to both floors they didn't previously have. The client is extremely happy."

Attorney Paul Peyronnin practices construction law at Baker Donelson, and played a critical role in the project. While his own office was renovated, Peyronnin shared office space with TMG's Orgeron.

"This isn't my first renovation project," Peyronnin said, "and it's always fascinating to see the process from the owner and contractor's perspectives,

instead of just the legal one. We had an excellent experience.

"Function is more critical than form," he said. "The aesthetics are important but the end result needs to function the way we live and work. The dynamics of the firm's personality and work style were addressed in ways everyone can appreciate. Whether we're working one-on-one with a client or hosting an event, we have the appropriate space and tools to do so. And in this case, it was the logistics getting there that were so daunting, and why I believe we made a great choice with our contractor. If I have another remodel project in my career, I'll be happy to work with The McDonnell Group again."

Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz (Baker Donelson) is the 73rd largest law firm in America. Its offices are staggered through six states to assist clients in 30 different legal specialties.



One of Baker Donelson's Thirteen Conference Rooms