

## **2022 Air and Waste Management Association Environmental Award**

### **Applicant:**

Adam Tatar  
Brownfield Coordinator  
Regional Planning Commission  
atatar@norpc.org

### **Project:**

Tate, Etienne, and Prevost Center  
5909 St. Claude Avenue  
New Orleans, LA 70117

Contaminated site investigation, remediation, and/or development.

### **Introduction**

On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, neighbors and elected officials gathered to celebrate the ribbon cutting at the Tate, Etienne, and Prevost Center in the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward of New Orleans. This new facility, which will provide affordable senior housing, community space, and a civil rights museum, is all the more incredible because it is located within the former McDonogh No. 19 School – the first school in the Deep South to integrate in the 1960s. This application will describe how the Brownfield Programs of the Regional Planning Commission and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality worked together with community leaders and local developers to transform a blighted historical landmark into vibrant community asset.

## Background



*McDonogh 19 Elementary School.*

The McDonogh 19 Elementary School was built in 1929 in the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward neighborhood of New Orleans – it was designed by architect Edgar Angelo Christy in the Italian Revival Style. In 1960, even though segregated schools had been made illegal with *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*, no state in the South had yet taken action to integrate their schools. McDonogh 19 remained an all-white school. Finally, a judge in 1960 ordered the Orleans Parish School Board to

desegregate its school, beginning November 1960.

On November 14, 1960, Leona Tate, Gail Etienne, and Tessie Prevost were escorted by Federal Marshals to be the first African-Americans to attend the formerly white-only school. The “McDonogh Three,” as the girls were nick-named, faced harassment and protesting crowds throughout the school year. They were forced to cover their classroom windows and have recess in the theatre, because the school yard was too dangerous.



The McDonogh Three completed their education in New Orleans and, in the early 1960s, McDonogh 19 Elementary was

*Student Ruby Bridges being escorted from the former McDonogh Elementary School by U.S. Marshalls.*

renamed “Louis D. Armstrong Elementary,”

after the native jazz legend. White flight caused the school to re-segregate almost immediately however, and it quickly became an all-black school. High crime and poverty heavily impacted the surrounding neighborhood. The district closed the school at the end of the 2004-2005 school year due to low test scores and inadequate funding for the building. It was further damaged in Hurricane Katrina, then sat vacant and shuttered for over 10 years.

Although many Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward residents did not return to the city following Katrina, Leona Tate remained. She founded the Leona Tate Foundation for Changed in 2009, and raised \$725,000 to purchase the building. In 2016, she led efforts to have the building placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Her goal was to transform the abandoned school into a community center, a living museum, senior housing, and a neighborhood anchor. The foundation began working with a local developer, Alembic Community Development, to realize their vision.

Before the shuttered school could be transformed however, a number of health and environmental concerns needed to first be addressed, and this is where the brownfield programs stepped in. The age of the school suggested the presence of lead based paint and asbestos contamination, not to mention mold and other health hazards. All of which would need to be sampled, tested, and remediated before renovation could take place.

### **Brownfield Work**



*Facade in 2019, before brownfield assessments began.*

The first step of the health and environmental remediation process at the old school began with a **Phase I Environmental Assessment**, funded by the Regional Planning Commission's (RPC) Brownfield Program. As expected, the



Phase I determined the likelihood of lead and asbestos containing materials such as floor tiles, piping, insulation, and fireproofing throughout the school site. The Phase I also identified peeling, suspected lead-based paint inside the building. Lead-based paint and asbestos inspections by certified inspectors were recommended before any renovation or demolition takes place.

Based on those recommendations, RPC Brownfield then funded a **Lead-Based Paint and Asbestos Survey** of the building. The

asbestos survey identified the following areas of the building to contain greater than 1% asbestos: vinyl floor tiles, drywall texture, mastic adhesive, and duct insulation. A licensed asbestos abatement contractor would need to perform cleanup activities before any demolition could take place. With regards to the lead-based paint

*Interior of the school during brownfield assessments.*

survey, the Housing and Urban Development's guidelines state that paint containing lead with a concentration greater than 1.0 mg/cm<sup>2</sup> by X-Ray fluorescent is considered lead-based paint. Of the 422 lead samples collected throughout the building, 138 results were equal to or greater than the HUD definition of lead based paint.

For projects utilizing EPA Brownfield Funds for environmental work, a required planning step between assessment and remediation is the **Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA)**. This document must also be made available for public comment. RPC Brownfields funded the ABCA study, which provide four clean-up alternatives along with cost estimates: No Action, Abatement of Friable ACM and LBP Stabilization, Abatement of all ACM and LBP Stabilization, Complete Abatement.

Once the ABCA was vetted by the public and finalized, the project was turned over to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality's (LDEQ) Targeted Brownfield Assessment Program to fund the remediation. LDEQ allocated \$150,000 at **clean up and/or stabilize lead and asbestos at the site.**

Brownfield Work	Source	Cost
Phase I ESA	Regional Planning Commission	\$5,721.50
Lead-based paint and asbestos survey	Regional Planning Commission	\$23,770.37
Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives	Regional Planning Commission	\$14,611.25
Phase I ESA (update)	Regional Planning Commission	\$4,175.00

Lead based paint and asbestos remediation	Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality	\$150,000
		<b>\$198,278.12</b>

Following LDEQ's brownfield remediation, the groundbreaking ceremony at the new Tate, Etienne, and Prevost Center took place in March of 2019. Utilizing over a dozen different funding sources including New Market Tax Credits, grants from the City of New Orleans, and the National Park Service, the former school underwent a \$16.2 million dollar renovation. Each dollar of brownfield funding helped to serve as a catalyst for an additional **\$82 dollars** in redevelopment.



*Leona Tate inside the Tate, Etienne and Prevost Center during the renovation. Courtesy of John Hailey Studios.*

## Ribbon Cutting

After years of work (including pauses for COVID and Hurricane Ida) the official ribbon cutting ceremony took place on May 4, 2022. Local officials, former McDonogh teachers, neighbors, high school marching bands, and the McDonogh Three were in attendance.



*Ribbon cutting ceremony at the Tate, Etienne, and Prevost Center. Photo courtesy of nola.com*



*Interior of the Tate, Etienne, and Prevost Center at the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony*