



HIGHER GROUND

Resurrecting the House of Dance and Feathers
in New Orleans' Ninth Ward

1 April 2006
Executive Summary



PROJECT **Locus**

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Organization: Project Locus

Project Locus is a grassroots, 501(c)(3) organization committed to educating architects and rebuilding communities through the sensitive design and construction of public structures in areas of need. We intend to offer the opportunity for higher architectural education to expand its curriculum from 'paper architecture' to the creation of real buildings and to sowing a moral sense of service within the community. The architecture profession has an ethical responsibility to help improve living conditions for the poor and disadvantaged. We hope to challenge architects to move the status quo towards the making of responsible environmental and social changes, and towards the creation of an architecture of decency, which elevates the spirit and betters the human condition. Our goal is to enable each participating student to cross the threshold of cultural and social disparity to design, create and to ultimately build, and to allow them to put their educational values to work as members of a community. Project Locus seeks to provide at no cost practical, yet beautiful architectural solutions to the needs of impoverished communities who would otherwise be unable to afford such efforts. Our aim is to practice within the limits of the vernacular and context of the community, and to create a sense of place that is warm, dry, and noble.

Project Locus was founded in the fall of 2000 by three graduate architecture students of the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles. Out of common goals, and mutual architectural interests, we developed the organization with the intention of trying to fill a void in professional practice at the level of service, in addressing critical problems in underserved communities. In the winter of 2004, we organized a sleeping bag drive for Baltimore's homeless population, which was extremely successful, receiving 400 donated bags from the Wal-Mart Foundation, more than \$25,000 in contributions from over 200 individual donors, and distributing more than 800 sleeping bags. Since then, we have implemented design-build projects nationwide including the rehabilitation of a dilapidated church in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Baltimore; the construction of a reception desk for a homeless shelter in Fayetteville, designed by University of Arkansas students; and the installation of a projection screen for an arts-related nonprofit working with at-risk Hispanic youth housed in a historic firehouse in East Los Angeles. Project Locus develops cultural events to promote the use of design as a tool for positive community change, including this year's ArchFest Boston, a week-long series of walks, talks and open buildings. Since August of 2005 we have been working in Kansas with Kansas State University architecture students to investigate built solutions for dying rural communities, or 'ghost towns'.

In September, Project Locus partnered with the Center for Bioenvironmental Research at Tulane and Xavier Universities to host two conferences addressing the destruction of Hurricane Katrina including the Re-inhabiting New Orleans workshop at Tulane University and the Arkansas Summit, gathering together educators and practitioners from across the country at the University of Arkansas. The primary outcome of the Summit was the establishment of a National Design-Build Consortium and, as a result, we are developing a project to be implemented during the first few weeks of January, 2006.

The intentions of Project Locus are by no means to engage in a series of singular acts, but to devise a new, proactive process for reassessing the identity of a community, and proposing and developing prototypical ideas for guiding and catalyzing its transformations. Addressing each case from a planning perspective, using extensive research and demographic data, our projects will confirm how architecture students and university programs are a practical and conceptual resource for the community, and how their energies and expertise can be employed to tackle current and future economic, social and environmental issues. The goal is not to solve every problem we meet, but rather, through constructing physical attempts, to create and strengthen community bonds and to inspire others to join the effort.

Context: Needs Assessment

Hurricane Katrina. On August 29th, Hurricane Katrina made landfall just east of New Orleans, Louisiana, causing widespread devastation across the Gulf States, becoming one of the worst natural disasters in United States history. The hardest hit victims of this tragedy were the poor and disadvantaged, both rural and urban dwellers, one quarter of who lived below the poverty line in households with a median income of less than \$8,000. 75 percent of the victims living in the heart of New Orleans lived in extreme poverty, without electricity and running water in many cases, and lacked the basic transportation necessary to escape the wrath of the storm; in essence, trapped by their destitution. As the human cost, through loss of life and separation from home, is unimaginably tragic, the physical cost is traumatic with some estimates claiming the loss of more than 100,000 homes in New Orleans alone.

New Orleans: High Grounds and Low. Surrounded by flood walls and levees, New Orleans has for more than a century successfully kept the dominant feature of its landscape--water--outside its city limits. The bowl-shaped city is separated into highlands, settled primarily by Anglo-Americans, Irish and German immigrants; and undesirable lowlands, characterized by frequent flooding and mosquitoes, populated mainly by African Americans and Southern and Eastern Europeans without other housing options. Eventually, entire neighborhoods formed in these low lying areas, including the Ninth Ward. Already between the largest river in North America and Lake Pontchartrain, another body of water was created in New Orleans when the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal was built in the 1920's. The Industrial Canal, as it is popularly known, split the Ninth Ward in half and had the unintended consequence of contributing to coastal erosion and funneling hurricane-induced storm surges into New Orleans' populated lowland neighborhoods. When the levees broke in August 2005, the high ground evaded inundation while the lowlands were devastated.

Ninth Ward. The Ninth Ward is the largest ward in the city stretching from the Rigolets and New Orleans East to the edge of the Mississippi River in the historic Bywater and Holy Cross neighborhoods. In the mid-twentieth century parts of the Ninth Ward adjacent to North Claiborne Avenue were developed and marketed as opportunities for black home ownership. The neighborhood was also home to many working class white residents. In the 1950's, the city developed two of the largest public housing developments in the country: Desire and Florida. Still strictly segregated, the Desire was built as a black development and the Florida with separate white and black portions. The developments were torn down in the 1990's and were being rebuilt when Hurricane Katrina hit.

The Ninth Ward is known for its robust commitment to family and community, and strong neighborhood pride, which can be seen at Carver Senior High football games, Holy Cross Neighborhood Association meetings, and the Nine Times and Big Nine social clubs' second line parades. This community spirit has continued to thrive despite hardships suffered throughout the flooding of Hurricane Betsy, white flight, and fights for city services, affordable housing, and environmental justice.

Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs. The Social Aid and Pleasure Club tradition dates back to the late 19th century in African American communities in New Orleans and the Freedmen's Aid Association, founded after the Civil War in 1865. The Association's goal was to provide loans, assistance and counsel, and a means of education to newly freed slaves, and this function is where the clubs and groups that followed derived their names. After the Association's demise, benevolent organizations arose within New Orleans neighborhoods to function as mutual aid societies. The Social Aid Clubs of the early 20th Century provided aid to fellow African Americans and insured that club members were provided a proper burial. For the poor, black residents of New Orleans, the clubs became a social safety net. From just before the turn of the century to the dawn of the civil rights era in the mid-1950s, African Americans were prohibited from participating in Mardi Gras and from entering the French Quarter or congregating and parading on the main streets until the late 1960's. Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs celebrated Fat Tuesday in their own unique ways and, along with the "Black Indians" and "street bands", provided the Black culture throughout lowland neighborhoods with alternative entertainment, and are attributed with the birth of Jazz. Most importantly, the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs serve as a mechanism for community self-reliance which, in light of the Urban Land Institute's report on rebuilding New Orleans, is significant as lowland neighborhoods that fail to redevelop sufficiently will most likely shrink or disappear. The restoration of these cultural institutions is key to the re-emergence of a way of life in impoverished New Orleans neighborhoods.

Content: Project description

During the summer of 2006, university students, volunteers and Project Locus will renovate and reconstruct a central Social Aid and Pleasure Club, the House of Dance and Feathers. We will attempt to address specific needs within the community, while reconstructing a sense of history and identity, and serving as a catalyst for future development. The design and construction will occur on and off-site. Additionally, during spring break 2006, students will assist in cleaning and clearing debris, and will complete a comprehensive planning analysis including a photographic essay.

Students will design using asset-based development whereby each student will propose an initial scheme, from which the group will draw the most successful elements to incorporate into a final proposal. Larry Bowne and Patrick Rhodes, project managers, will initiate and facilitate the design process through maintaining communication between students and community members and by insuring that the student's response is appropriate to address the needs of the community and the environment.

The House of Dance and Feathers, Ninth Ward Social Aid and Pleasure Club

Ronald Lewis' House of Dance and Feathers celebrates the oldest Social Aid and Pleasure Club in the Ninth Ward. Mr. Lewis intends for the museum to serve not only as a storehouse for historical artifacts, as it did before the disaster, but also as an educational and cultural center for neighborhood youth. In cooperation with Mr. Lewis, we intend to design and construct an enclosed, conditioned space of approximately 500 square feet. The building will serve as a space for neighborhood participation in the continuing history of the Ninth Ward, and as a practical and cultural design resource for members of the community who will rebuild.

The Lewis Residence

The Lewis home, which shares the same property as the museum, was damaged during the storm and is currently uninhabitable. While 65% of the structure is in tact, extensive demolition, cleaning and finishing work must be done to allow for Ronald Lewis and his family to return. It is necessary for Mr. Lewis to be on-site to effectively operate the museum and community center, and therefore it is imperative that we rehabilitate the Lewis residence and construct the House of Dance and Feathers museum simultaneously.

A building permit has been acquired for the construction of the above project. There are no zoning or Fire Marshal clearances to be obtained.

Goals

- To promote design as a tool for affecting positive community change, and as a necessary aspect of everyday life.
- To design and reconstruct community structures in damaged areas in order to initiate community outreach and reinvestment, and to restore lowland communities' mechanisms for self reliance.
- To generate public awareness and encourage community support and involvement, and build a base of support for the continuing rebuilding effort.
- To promote cross-cultural and interdisciplinary learning, both within the project team and in the team's relation to other consultants, community leaders, and local residents.
- To provide an educational opportunity that incorporates the visual arts for participating students and members of the community, especially students and children.
- To reconstruct and preserve the history of the community.

Objectives

- To combine, condense and disseminate the products of our design in the form of an exhibition, publication or other viable method to a wide audience.
- To implement the reconstruction of a cultural resource, a Social Aid and Pleasure Club, and to encouraging community leaders and residents to organize toward the further redevelopment of their communities.
- To include university students and local neighborhood children in the design of the museum, and to expose returning residents to the rich cultural history of their community through displayed artifacts and practiced traditions, while providing resources needed for the rebuilding of the Ninth Ward.
- To rebuild and beautify community spaces within lowland New Orleans neighborhoods through design and construction sensitive to the local vernacular and context.
- To reincorporate the history of the Ninth Ward within the museum for the benefit of returning residents and future visitors to New Orleans.

Educational Outcomes

- To understand the practice of community-based design through the execution of a community-based design-build project and through case studies of other projects and practitioners.
- To build and maintain successful relationships with clients and communities.
- To develop awareness for community projects and initiatives.
- To identify and make use of beneficial partnerships.
- To learn how to fundraise, including how to write a grant proposal.
- To work responsibly and ethically.
- To gain valuable construction and real-world design experience.
- To gain an understanding of the impact design can have on a marginalized community.

Assessment

- Student's design and construction work will be evaluated on a daily basis. Their learning success will be measured by their ability to complete tasks with a high level of quality and craft.
- Students will be asked to maintain a daily journal of their experience, including questions and comments on the process.
- Students will be required to write a final paper of no more than 5 pages describing the successes and failures of the project.
- Students and community members will meet at the end of the summer construction period to discuss the outcomes of the project.
- The project will be open for peer review, and feedback elicited. Additionally, the project team will continue long-term evaluation through an ongoing dialogue with Ronald Lewis and the community, at large.

Logistics: Schedule, Budget, Safety and Equipment

Schedule

Project design and construction will occur between March 18th and August 1st. Students will begin design during a site visit and community design charrette in New Orleans March 18th through 26th, and will complete construction between the end of April and August, both on site and at Kansas State University, employing prefabrication construction methods. The proposed timetable is as follows:

March 8	Informational meeting at Kansas State University. Students will be oriented to the site and project. Brian Azcona, Kansas University PhD candidate, will present a lecture on the sociological and political causes of the New Orleans disaster.
March 18 – 26	Kansas State University alternative spring break. Students will tour the city, participate in a community design charrette and begin schematic design on the House of Dance and Feathers museum and the Lewis residence. Preliminary design work will be submitted to the New Orleans Museum of Art for an exhibition featuring design work addressing the reconstruction of New Orleans post Hurricane Katrina. In addition to beginning design work, students will clean and clear the site, begin demolition work, and designate a space for staging of materials and construction.
March 27 – May 5	Students will complete schematic design, design development and construction documents. Also, students will begin construction of portable exhibition cabinets for the House of Dance and Feathers museum and component structural systems, including kitchen and bath systems for the Lewis Residence. The team will attempt to complete as much construction during this phase as possible.
May 19 – June 2	Two week design-build blitz. Students will complete as much prefabrication as possible. Prefabricated components will be packaged and shipped to the New Orleans Ninth Ward site.
June 5 – July 28	Build. Students and Volunteers will complete construction on the House of Dance and Feathers museum and the Lewis Residence.
July 29	Grand re-opening of the House of Dance and Feathers and community celebration.
July 30 – August 5	Students will complete construction and finish work.

Budget

Program Costs:

Construction Costs Museum:	estimated at \$50/sf, 500 sf	\$25,000
Construction Costs Residence:	estimated at 35% rehabilitation	\$20,000
Conservation and Maintenance of Collection	:	\$20,000
Stipend for Project Managers:		\$15,000
On-site Shop Equipment:		\$10,000
Travel Expenses for Ronald Lewis:		\$ 500
Ten Scholarships for Student Volunteers:	10 x \$2,500 for 10 weeks	\$25,000

Total Budget: **\$115,500**

We have provided a case study of a project, recently completed, of similar size and scope. The case study was used to set a target budget for our designs, and to give potential funders an idea of the expected finished product.

Small Building Case Study

Chicken coop, Rose Hill, KS

Design: Kansas State University College of Architecture, Planning and Design (Gabe McKee, Liz Nease, Evan Needham, Tanner Pikop, Mike Rieger and Staci Wayne; Larry Bowne, faculty advisor):

Construction: Kansas State University College of Architecture, Planning and Design.

Scope: Chicken house and chicken run, approximately 300 sq ft, designed by an interdisciplinary team of six architecture, interior architecture and landscape architecture students under direction of architecture professor Larry Bowne. A work crew consisting of dozens of students from the Kansas State University College of Architecture, Planning and Design fabricated the building in four days as part of the *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* television show. The episode is scheduled to air Sunday 8 January on ABC.

Time Frame: Ten days (design); two days (off-site fabrications); four days (on-site construction)

Budget: Preliminary estimate \$12,500-15,000, or roughly \$40/square foot (final accounting is now underway).

Materials:

Quick-setting Concrete: used for foundation (by others).

Structurally insulated panels: used as wall and roof structure of the chicken house.

1" x 3" Pine Wood Slats: used as cladding of the chicken house.

2" x 2" Pine Wood Slats: used as cladding of the chicken house.

Galvanized corrugated sheet metal: used for roofing of the chicken house.

4'x4" pressure treated lumber: used as posts and joists to support the chicken run.

1'x3" pressure treated slats: used to enclose the chicken run.

Galvanized steel wire mesh: used as roofing of the chicken run.



Confirmed Sources of Funding

The Charles Engelhard Foundation	\$50,000
FEMA Relief Funds	\$15,000
Total Confirmed Funding:	\$65,000
Funding Deficit:	\$50,500

We are requesting a gift in the amount of \$50,000 to match the Charles Engelhard Foundation grant, all of which will be used to sponsor volunteers and to purchase materials for construction. In addition to confirmed funding, we will offset the cost of completing the project through donated and scrap materials, and contributions from local professionals and businesses. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Larry Bowne Assistant Professor Kansas State University
House of Dance and Feathers Project Coordinator

After earning his masters in architecture from Harvard University, Larry served his internship in Boston (the Office of Peter Rose, Cambridge Seven Associates) and in New York City (Selldorf Architects, BKS/K Architects), where he served as project designer on both institutional and residential projects in the U.S., Canada, and abroad.

In 1997, he opened a small practice in New York City with two classmates from Harvard. The firm, B&R Projects, prepared designs for projects both domestic and international, including commissions in Buenos Aires, Zurich, and Kosovo. While the firm worked primarily on residential projects—mostly New York City apartments—they also designed retail, commercial and public spaces. The firm completed dozens of projects in New York City and beyond at a range of budgets (from tight to luxurious), timetables (from truncated to extended) and scales (furniture to multi-story commercial). His design work has been published and exhibited widely, including articles in *Dwell* and *Interiors* magazines and shows at the Marianne Boesky Gallery (New York, NY) and the University of Kansas, Marvin Hall (Lawrence, KS).

Since 2003, Larry has served as principal of Larry Bowne Architect, formerly of New York City and now located in Manhattan, Kansas. He has completed several New York City apartments, including the conversion of a former sweatshop into multi-unit live/work artists' spaces.

Larry has taught at Kansas State University since the fall of 2003, first as a visitor and now as tenure-track faculty. He teaches architectural studio, building construction, and seminars in architectural theory. He recently served as faculty advisor to an interdisciplinary team of architects, landscape architects, and interior architects, who designed and built a small-scale project in conjunction with the Extreme Makeover: Home Edition television show.

Larry's research interests include urban housing, civic infrastructure, and tectonic innovation.

Education

M. Arch I., Master of Architecture, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 1992

Bachelor of Arts (Political Science), University of California, Los Angeles, 1988.
Political Science, Magna Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, College Honors

Registration / Professional Affiliation

American Institute of Architects, New York chapter, 2001-present

Registered architect, State of New York, 1999-present.

Teaching Experience

Assistant Professor of Architecture, Kansas State University, Fall 2003 – present

Professional Experience

Larry Bowne Architect, New York, New York and Manhattan, Kansas, 2003-present.

B&R Projects (Partnership with Andrew Rejniak), New York, New York, 1998-2003

BMR Industries (Partnership with Craig Mutter and Andrew Rejniak), New York, New York, 1997-1998

Byrns, Kendall & Schieferdecker Architects (Project Architect), New York, New York, 1996-1997

The Office of Peter Rose (Project Architect), Cambridge, MA, 1993-1995

Patrick Rhodes Founder and Executive Director, Project Locus, Assistant Professor KSU
House of Dance and Feathers Project Coordinator

Patrick is a 1996 graduate of the University of Florida architecture program and received a Master of Architecture from the Southern California Institute of Architecture in 1999. He spent the next four years in Los Angeles designing affordable senior and family housing, employed full-time while maintaining a small freelance business. During that time, he performed design work for and was offered positions with several firms including NBBJ Architecture and Frank Gehry Partners.

In 2001, he formed Project Locus, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, to design and build community structures in areas of need, and to pursue a growing interest in teaching. In the fall of 2005, after several years developing and implementing projects across the country, Patrick accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Architecture at Kansas State University, where he intends to further develop the goals and reach of Project Locus, creating opportunities for students to examine their local community through the design studio, expanding their research and investigations to emerging areas of need, while providing a critical vehicle to work towards the union of education and community design through engaging students in the design and construction of spaces in the poorest communities.

Education

Master of Architecture, Southern California Institute of Architecture, 1999

Bachelor of Design, University of Florida, 1996
Undergraduate Design Achievement Award

Teaching Experience

Assistant Professor of Architecture, Kansas State University, 2005 – present

Professional Experience

Davis Design Development, Boston MA, Project Manager, 2004 – 2005

Peter Ratcliffe Architects, Baltimore MD, Project Manager, 2003 – 2004

Leonard Grant Architect, San Luis Obispo CA, 2002 – 2003

John Cotton Architects, Los Angeles, with a concentration in low-income and affordable housing, 1998 – 2002

NBBJ Sports and Entertainment Architecture, Los Angeles, 1999

Associate, Geoffrey Scott and Associates, Los Angeles, 1998

Historic American Building Survey, the Department of the Interior, Montgomery AL, 1997

Project Locus Officers and Board Members

Melissa Faith Coleman, Secretary, 2nd Year student, Harvard Medical School
Yuruani LaFontaine, Director, BS Psychology, University of Southern California
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