

Community IMPACT Series: Bayou District Foundation, April 6, 2010

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NEW ORLEANS, LA (WWNO) - There may not seem to be much common ground between the site of an old housing project and a golf course. But under a new plan now being marshaled by the nonprofit Bayou District Foundation, golf in New Orleans City Park and the former St. Bernard housing development nearby in Gentilly are shaping up to be one game-changing team.

That's because the same nonprofit foundation chosen by the government to rebuild the old St. Bernard site as a mixed-income housing community is also helping redevelop golf courses in City Park, which remain ravaged from post-Katrina flood damage. A share of revenues from those future golf operations will help fund programs intended to make the Bayou District much more than a residential development, including an early learning center for pre-school children and services to help public housing residents gain self-sufficiency.

It's all inspired by a similar community in Atlanta called East Lake. Since the mid-90s, East Lake has incorporated golf and a mixed-income residency model to transform a badly-deteriorated housing project there. Here's Gerry Barousse, chairman of the Bayou District Foundation:

"That will really allow us to have the kind of well-rounded components that are necessary to provide more than just housing. And I think that's where the success of East Lake and other mixed income communities come in. It's that it really provides more than just pure housing but also programs that really go to support the families, not just the kids, but the entire family."

"As we looked at developing our model and really wanting to have a holistic approach, we recognized that golf provided us an opportunity to really have an economic engine. If we could be involved in the creation, the re-creation of golf in City Park and partner with the park in that process, bringing outside philanthropic capital, we then would have the opportunity to participate, the Bayou District Foundation, in the revenues generated from golf. And that will ultimately allow us to support both the early learning and K-through-eight, as well as programs within the community, vocational programming, financial literacy, all of the different support services that really are critical to being able to help change the cycle of poverty."

Those educational components Barousse mentioned are key to the Bayou District, and they are, quite literally, central to the development's design. An early-learning facility and K-through-eight charter school are planned for the very heart of the old St. Bernard site, specifically situated so that parents can walk their children to school and to make these schools natural centers of neighborhood attention. They will have extended hours, offering more throughout the day to students, and a YMCA is also planned for the Bayou District. Further, plans for a new public high school to serve the same area are now underway.

Residents are already moving into the Bayou District's first phase. When fully complete later this year, this phase will have 466 units divided evenly between market-rate apartments, subsidized apartments and public housing. The foundation intends to build a second phase, plus senior

housing and new single-family homes to bring the total Bayou District project to some 1,325 units.

At 56 acres, or about 16 city blocks, the Bayou District is big. But the foundation has even broader impacts in mind. Barousse explains the larger vision:

"It's really kind of an anchor into the redevelopment of that whole area in the community. Not just in the immediate neighborhood, but really as it reaches beyond what we consider the Bayou District," says Barousse. "I think as people have seen the quality of what's going back it's giving them confidence to invest in the neighborhood and recognize that it's time to come back."

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