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## Former convent could be born again as yuppie hub

by Emilie Bahr Staff Writer



Reuben Teague of NOLA Community Development, left, and Barrett Cooper of Stirling Properties stand inside a former convent at 4230 S. Broad St. that could be converted into a gathering place for young professionals. (Photo by Emilie Bahr)

The stately brick structure at 4230 S. Broad St., adjacent to Blessed Trinity Catholic Church in the Katrina-ravaged Broadmoor neighborhood, has sat vacant since the hurricane, its corridors unoccupied, its moldered infrastructure gutted and removed.

A cross-adorned entryway is among the few suggestions of the building's former use as a residence for nuns.

Today, the space is being reconceived as a community gathering spot, a place for neighborhood residents and young professionals to meet and exchange ideas, perhaps over coffee or a meal. At least, that's the vision of those involved in the Broadmoor "Third Place" initiative, which aims to turn the site into an anchor of neighborhood life and, in the process, possibly establish a new model for commercial development in the city.

The idea is known as "crowd sourcing," a relatively new real estate development model promoted by Neil Takemoto of Washington, D.C., wherein projects are shaped largely by the surrounding community.

"The entire process starts with the community," said Zack Kupperman, a Tulane University law student and founding member of NOLA YURP, which is a partner on the project along with the Broadmoor Improvement Association and NOLA Community Development, a sustainable development firm that is acting as developer on the convent conversion project.

The groups form what's known as the development's beta community, the people who help to shape the project and are committed to patronizing the businesses that ultimately set up shop there.

"The developer gets a market-driven product and, in exchange, the community gets exactly what they want," Kupperman said.

Project principals envision a café or restaurant and possibly small retail outlet at the convent site, which could also house office space upstairs.

Kupperman said he first got interested in crowd sourcing as a real estate application while working in the industry in Austin, Texas. When he returned to his native New Orleans in 2006, he said, it seemed a natural model to follow as the city attempted to rebuild in a more sustainable, forward-thinking way.

When NOLA YURP was founded the following year, it was decided that the group would adopt a crowd sourcing project as one of its initiatives, aiming to bring back commercial vibrancy and a community gathering place in areas of the city where such elements were lacking. The group enlisted the help of NOLA Community Development, which selected the Broadmoor neighborhood as a target site.

Those involved in the project say the neighborhood was appealing because of the resiliency of its residents at the same time that commercial activity has been slow to return.

"Broadmoor is a great neighborhood that is coming back," said Reuben Teague, a principal in NOLA Community



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Development.

The convent site was chosen in December. The developer's relationship with the church is still being worked out, but NOLA Community Development intends to lease the site from the archdiocese and sublease space to interested tenants, Teague said. He said he'd like to see construction begin on the project this summer, but conceded that the project time frame is largely contingent on lining up solid tenants and financing.

**Barrett Cooper**, a commercial leasing specialist with **Stirling Properties**, is helping to identify potential tenants for the space. Given the state of the national economy, he conceded, "finding tenants is difficult. We do need the help of the community."

For more information on the Broadmoor Third Place initiative, visit the project's Web site, [www.destinationbroadmoor.com](http://www.destinationbroadmoor.com).

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