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THE HOUSE THAT BARBECUE BUILT

Children's Hospital's new Hogs House Family Center opens on historic U.S. Marine Hospital campus

BY Keith Marshall | PHOTOS BY Liz Jurey

ONE OF THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS on the former U.S. Marine Hospital site Uptown is once again providing a healing space for families and patients — and it's thanks in large part to New Orleans' love of pulled pork and spicy ribs.

With a nearly \$2 million donation from Hogs for the Cause, the annual springtime barbecue festival that raises money for pediatric brain cancer, Children's Hospital of New Orleans recently opened Hogs House Family Center, a residence for loved ones of patients undergoing treatment. The bright, airy facility is housed in a 1930s building that previously served as a garage and maintenance structure for the Public Service Hospital, which operated on the site in the early 20th century.

While the building's Georgian Revival façade has been restored, there was little to preserve in the 7,800-square-foot interior, which gave architects from Eskew+Dumas+Ripple free rein inside. The Hogs House now features bedrooms, kitchen and dining facilities, cheerful rooms for socializing, and management areas.

"There are 13 suites," said Amanda Rivera, Eskew + Dumas + Ripple's project manager. "We've been calling them sleeping rooms. We've prioritized more of the public areas as communal spaces, to promote interactions between families and hopefully create a community of support at the house."

Hogs House is part of the transformation and restoration of the oak-shaded campus of the former U.S. Marine Hospital. Located on Tchoupitoulas Street between Henry Clay Avenue, State Street and the Mississippi River, the 17-acre site was acquired by neighboring Children's Hospital in 2014. Construction began in January 2018.

Three historic buildings — the 1830s Overseer's Cottage, the 1880s Director's House and a cottage believed to have served as a kitchen on the site — also are being restored and adapted for new uses. Wherever possible, the alleys of live oaks, planted in 1943 by Pentagon landscape architect Albert D. Taylor, are being preserved.

Early in the planning, Children's Hospital officials approached Hogs for the Cause founders Becker Hall and Rene Louapre with the idea of funding a room at the new facility. Hall and Louapre had bigger ideas.

"We had heard wonderful things about what Target House was doing at St. Jude (Children's Research Hospital in Memphis) in the same vein. We quickly said, 'We don't want a room. We want the whole thing,'" Hall said.

The new Hogs House is the latest chapter in the long history of the Uptown hospital grounds. The site can trace its past owners back to New Orleans' founder Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, Sieur de Bienville, and later landowner Bernard de Marigny. Jean Etienne de Bore, the city's first mayor, perfected the granulation of sugar in Louisiana on the site, which he operated as a successful plantation.

There have been four U.S. Marine hospitals on the site, the most recent being the Public Service Hospital of the 1930s, when most





of the buildings on the campus were constructed. After a late-20th-century stint as the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital, many of the structures fell into disrepair.

Now, the projected cost of revitalizing the campus, renovating the historic buildings and constructing new structures — with a new garage and conference center in the former gymnasium already completed — is \$300 million.

Hogs for the Cause has been a supporter of Children's Hospital for several years. Including the new Hogs House donation, the festival has contributed \$2.4 million to the hospital and patient families. The springtime barbecue bonanza is the brainchild of longtime friends Hall and Louapre, who grew up forming a short-lived football league and other ventures that prepared them for what has become their lives' calling: raising money for pediatric cancer patients.

In 2008, Louapre, an attorney, was operating a food blog when he learned that four-year-old Ben Sarrat, Jr., son of a sous chef they knew, had been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. Hall and Louapre organized a fundraiser for the Sarrat family. The event raised more than they expected and sparked the idea for a full barbecue festival.

Ten years later, 85 teams participated in what has become one of the most anticipated food events on the spring calendar. Now held on the lakefront near the University of New Orleans, the event's total revenue approached \$3 million this year, and expectations are higher for the 2019 "Hogs," which will be held March 29-30.

Hall, a former stockbroker, now runs Hogs full time. "It's an amazing feeling, almost immeasurable," he said. "It's a mix of know-

ing that you can point to something tangible every day, knowing so many families are being positively affected, and it's also a testament to how far Hogs has come in 10 years."

Hogs House already is providing tangible benefits for families. Tiffany Noguera, a mother from Prairieville, was one of the first residents, thrilled to be so near to her son Noah, who was undergoing his third surgery for brain cancer.

"It was frightening," she recalled. "He was airlifted here. What can I tell you? As he went into surgery, I told him, 'If you see the light, listen to Mommy and come back.' He pointed to the door and said he'd come back to Mommy's voice."

During such an emotional time, to have her suite just a short walk away has been a source of solace, Noguera said. On good days, she can walk the grounds with Noah.

"It's beautiful here, and it's peaceful," Noguera said. "You feel like you're at the beach — just look at the colors. It's tranquil. I was one of the first residents, and you could see the joy on the faces of the staff."

"I love that we have our own bathroom, so you don't feel like you have to wear shower shoes," she said with a laugh. "The colors and beautiful touches everywhere make me want to wake up and be here."

The interior design is bright and cheerful, with more than a few adornments that visually link the facility to its benefactor. Pigs are everywhere.

"Knowing about the hard work that went into the fundraising for this house by the Hogs for the Cause team, we wanted to be sure that the families visiting the house were reminded of this organization at every turn," said Rivera, adding that the porcine



design is a source of delight for residents. “We’ve got pig book ends, pig door knockers, pig donor name plates, pig sitting stools in the play area; they’re everywhere.

“Architect Wendy Kerrigan generated an interiors scheme that just made this project,” Rivera added. “The calming colors intend to provide a place of respite for the occupants, who are dealing with a heavy emotional load at the hospital. The children visiting the space experience whimsical patterns in the wall coverings and pillows, and have a pretty incredible play area at the second floor.”

Given the impact of the facility on families, Rivera said the project has been “truly a pleasure for our team.

“Hogs House is a story of how a community came together to prioritize the patients and their families, to express compassion for those families who are dealing with a child in treatment,” she added. “We’ve made a better place for them to rest while they’re in New Orleans for treatment, designing a space that invokes a much larger community impact.”

Matthew Schaefer, Children’s Hospital’s chief operating officer, echoed that sentiment. “Within walking distance, you now have both quality treatment and quality family experience,” he said. “It represents the best of everything that family-centered health care can be.”



TOP: Interior spaces in the new Hogs House are decorated in a calming color scheme. **MIDDLE:** Hogs for the Cause founders Becker Hall and Rene Louapre. **BOTTOM:** The 1930s Georgian Revival-style building previously served as a garage or maintenance structure.