

From the  
**LOUISIANA**  
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## Lending a Helping Hand: Dedicated Staff Members Make Historic Grant Program a Success

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The Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation's Historic Building Recovery Grant Program has been a great success, largely due to a highly qualified and extremely dedicated staff.

Initially, this program was given legs by the passionate efforts of Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu, Dick Moe of the National Trust, and representatives of the Preservation Resource Center who lobbied Congress for funding to help New Orleanians recover their heritage. Once funding was in place, the important work of the program began under the direction of Dabne Whitmore, an experienced grants administrator specialist with the State of Louisiana. Mrs. Whitmore, along with a host of volunteers, started working with local neighborhood associations and the public in the fall of 2006. By the time the first grants were being awarded in early 2007, the office was staffed with an

administrative assistant, an accountant and four project officers. The project officers hit the ground running, meeting directly with grantees to assess their historic buildings' damage, and to map out a path to move them home again. Less than six weeks after the grant application period was closed, the Division of Historic Preservation sent award letters to homeowners and, ten days later, executed the first grants. When the second round of grant money was allocated in the summer of 2007, three more project officers were added to the staff to manage the increased caseload of grantees.

After doing an outstanding job of getting the program up and running and steering its progress for almost two years, Dabne Whitmore left the office at the end of July, 2008 to take a position overseeing the Lieutenant Governor's World Cultural Economy Forum Initiative. She will be sorely missed.

Currently the office in New Orleans is staffed by Tracy Nelson, who recently assumed the position of program director, and six project officers, as well as an accountant who works in the Baton Rouge office. Together, they bring a wealth of relevant technical, architectural and historic preservation experience with them from a variety of educational and work backgrounds.

### How Does the Grant Work?

Project officers have a three-point focus as they work with building owners to develop their plan for utilizing the grant funds: to stabilize and weatherize the building, to make the building habitable, and in doing all of this, preserve its historic character by appropriately repairing or replacing original architectural features.

Work carried out with the grant funds is as varied as the buildings themselves but must be focused on repairing

direct or indirect hurricane damage. The work includes repairing or replacing just about any part of a building you can think of: roofs, porches, columns, brackets and other decorative elements, windows, flooring, weatherboards, chimneys, foundations and structural framing, plaster work and sheetrock, historic signage, stained glass, staircases, doors and claw-foot tubs.

Historic elements generally must be replaced with in-kind materials; for example, if historic wooden shutters can't be repaired, they must be replaced with appropriate wooden shutters. Because the grant award rests on the building's eligibility for the National Register, changes to any historic features that would compromise the building's contributing status for the National Register are limited, whether being paid for by the grant program or not.

Less historic features are often also paid for with grant funds. Examples



**Grant Project Officer Megan Lord with grantee Louise Davis in New Orleans' Esplanade Ridge National Register district.**

Based on the feedback from the grant recipients, the Historic Building Recovery Grant Program has the reputation of being one of the most successful hurricane recovery programs in the New Orleans area because it actually brings people home. The dedication of the staff and their ability to work outside



**Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu with grant staff at October 2007 press conference in New Orleans**

include electrical, plumbing, and heating/air conditioning systems destroyed in the hurricane or the flood afterwards. These systems, though not historic features per se, can be covered by the grants because they are necessary systems that make buildings habitable. It is widely recognized that an uninhabited building is much more likely to fall into bad repair than a building that is inhabited; thus the inclusion of this in the focus of the grant work.

Many of the projects cost a great deal more than the amount of the Historic Building Recovery grant, and grantees make up for the shortfall in a variety of ways. Some people have put their Road Home and insurance money together with the grant funds, or have taken out additional loans to enable them to complete their houses. Others have been fortunate to receive assistance from the Preservation Resource Center's Rebuilding Together program or the PRC/National Trust "Home Again" grant program. In these cases, the staff has worked collaboratively with these other programs to maximize the resources available to help fix these beautiful historic houses and to help return people home.

the expected scope of their position has been the foundation of this program and is primarily responsible for the program's success. And it is safe to say that these efforts are all helping to save part of the irreplaceable historic culture of Louisiana.



**Grant Project Officer Philip Gilmore with grantee Delores Napoleon in Holy Cross, one of New Orleans' 19 National Register districts.**

Next month the Division of Historic Preservation will begin showcasing some of the grant recipients' projects. The series will continue into next year.



**Master craftsman and historic masonry expert Teddy Pierre repoints a brick wall on a property that benefited from the Historic Building Recovery Grant program in New Orleans' Faubourg Marigny.**