

River Center Receives Land Gift

Inside Tulane by Arthur Nead

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Tulane's plans for a multi-purpose research and educational center, named RiverSphere, have received a big boost with a gift of 5.25 acres of riverside property from a local business group. The land, worth \$7.4 million, is a donation from River Park Partnership, headed by Joseph Canizaro, Coleman Adler and Bill Goldring.

"I see RiverSphere as being in many ways Tulane's new riverfront campus," says Doug Meffert, associate director of the Center for Bioenvironmental Research at Tulane and Xavier universities and a clinical associate professor in environmental health sciences. "Research space on the uptown campus is extremely limited now, so we see it as an opportunity."

Several hurdles need to be cleared before Tulane can begin to make use of the property. A linear strip all on the river side of the floodwall, the property starts at the middle of the former River City Casino and continues downstream underneath the Delta Queen terminal.

"Tulane owns the land," says Meffert, "but the wharves and buildings on top of it are owned by the Port of New Orleans, so we have to enter into a lease with the port to be able to occupy any of the buildings."

Tulane is working to develop a memorandum of understanding with the port on the property use and is also looking at acquiring an additional parcel of land adjacent to and under the remaining area of the casino, according to Meffert.

The RiverSphere is the initial phase of a much grander project, the National Center for the Mississippi River, a concept first floated by John McLachlan, director of the Center for Bioenvironmental Research, and John Barry, author of *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America*, and a distinguished visiting scholar at Tulane.

"We've had a task force on this for about four years," says Meffert. "It includes people from Tulane and Xavier and many community leaders."

The task force's long-term vision is to partner with the Trust for Public Land to create a multi-purpose public green space stretching along the bank of the Mississippi, anchored by Tulane's RiverSphere.

In the near term, RiverSphere will serve some practical purposes.

One of the first uses of RiverSphere would be for the river, estuary and coastal wetland-related research that's happening through the Center for

Bioenvironmental Research, says Meffert. "We have a 60-foot research vessel, the *R/V Eugenie*. We are renting a slip on Lake Pontchartrain, but we would be eager to start docking at RiverSphere. Not only could we board the vessel from there, but we could start developing wet labs and storage space for our researchers and investigators."

More than research will ultimately flourish at RiverSphere. According to Meffert, there could be exhibits, performance spaces, conference space and educational facilities. "RiverSphere could be a home for science, dance, the humanities, or architecture--anything that relates to the river where space is needed and being on the river would be advantageous," he says.

"It could be immense for Tulane, immense for the community and immense for the nation--and I'm not exaggerating."

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