

New life begins for Holy Rosary Institute

Amanda McElfresh, The Daily Advertiser Published: January 18, 2017, 2:11 pm



The historic Holy Rosary institute receives \$450,000 from the National Park Service. Rehab Funding. Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2017. (Photo: SCOTT CLAUSE / USATODAY Network)

([The Daily Advocate](#)) – The National Park Service has awarded a \$450,000 grant to the Holy Rosary Institute to begin repair work and redevelopment of the historic site.

The institute opened in 1913 as an industrial school for African-American women. It began accepting male students in 1947. The school has been closed since 1993, and the site has fallen into significant disrepair.

“In 1913, Holy Rosary made history in Lafayette, Louisiana as it began to educate African-Americans here in Lafayette at a time when it was still illegal in the state of Louisiana,” said Dustin Cravins, president of the Holy Rosary Redevelopment Board. “Here we are, 104 years later, making history again.”

Cravins said the first step is to stabilize the three-story structure.

“South Louisiana weather dictates that we have to do something with that building. We’re one storm away from losing it,” he said. “As we stabilize that building and get it in a state we’re comfortable with, we can begin the work of planning and putting some tenants in there and making it a living and breathing thing for this community.”

Cravins estimated a full renovation of the site would cost \$4 million to \$5 million.

Cravins said the project would not be possible without help from multiple entities. Shanea Nelson, director of Lafayette Consolidated Government’s community development department, first discovered the grant and suggested the Holy Rosary board apply for it.

“This award serves as a catalyst for a partnership between the Holy Rosary Redevelopment Board and LCG to leverage the grant funding in order to acquire additional resources for the full restoration of the school,” Nelson said in a statement. “LCG is excited to engage other local and state elected officials to see this effort through to fruition.”

In addition, Acadiana legislators including Rep. Terry Landry and Rep. Vincent Pierre continually pushed for restoration work, Cravins said.

Also, One Acadiana has pledged their support and will work with the Holy Rosary board to finalize long-term plans for the site.

“The focus will be to sit down and kind of polish off that plan and make sure that whatever Rosary becomes, it’s something that’s a reflection of the community and the needs of the community that it sits in,” Cravins said.

The Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission has also helped secure a \$15,000 local grant that will go toward the Holy Rosary gala fundraiser event later this year.

“I’m personally so proud to be a part of today,” Lafayette Mayor-President Joel Robideaux said. “Every time I would drive by this property, it would just pain me to see the building continue to decline ... When Dr. Nelson came to me and said there was maybe a grant opportunity for Rosary, it was a no-brainer for me. It was an easy decision.”

The grant is part of \$7.75 million in funding the National Park Service is providing to 39 projects across the country. All of the projects highlight sites and stories associated with the civil rights movement and African-American experience in the 20th century.