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DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE NEWS

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION ISSUE

Preserving Mobile – A Valuable Constant in a Changing City

By Rhonda Davis

During the month of May the nation will celebrate Historic Preservation Month. For Mobilians, residents of a city that is over 300 years old, let the month of May be a time when we pause and reflect on our city's history and the legacy that has been left by those pioneers, dreamers, builders, leaders and every-day-folk that have contributed to the fabric of our hometown. This issue will celebrate Mobile's historic preservation successes, and our hope is that you will join us in the month's celebrations too. Take a day to visit Fort Conde, stroll through a historic neighborhood, visit one of our historic museum houses or picnic in one of our beautiful, historic parks. Take a moment to admire a magnificently restored building. In that magical moment we hope you will understand what makes Mobile special and why preserving the past is so critical to her future.

When we describe Mobile we use words like romantic, lovely, charming and historic. The unique characteristics that define Mobile always include our ancient live oak trees and the historic homes and buildings that line the streets we travel every day.

Our historic buildings are what primarily set Mobile apart from other places we visit. Whether it is grand buildings like the newly restored Battle House Hotel, or the long-preserved and stately homes like the Oakleigh House Museum, or the simple shotgun houses lining the streets of the Church Street East Historic District, these structures play the most critical role in defining who we are as a city.

As Mobile stands on the brink of rapid economic growth, preserving our historic homes and buildings will be more important than ever if we want to maintain our sense of place. Since the 1960s Mobile has lost well over 2,100 historic structures to urban renewal, neglect and arson. Preservation efforts must be supported and must continue as we fight to revitalize downtown and retain our identity as a community.

Elizabeth Ann Brown, State Preservation Officer for the Alabama Historical Commission, explained that historic preservation is important to a community for four basic reasons. "First, it helps protect public and private investment in homes and neighborhoods. Secondly, it provides a sense of place and a unique heritage. It helps us feel connected to, and feel pride in, where we live. And lastly, preservation provides opportunities for economic development through heritage tourism."

Preservation as an Economic Engine

"Every study shows that a restoration is better for the local economy than new construction. It just makes sense," stated Devereaux Bemis, Director, Mobile Historic Development Commission. "Restoration of historic buildings is labor intensive whereas building new is material intensive. Because old buildings are renovated, salvaging much of the original materials, those costs are minimized. Instead, local craftsman are hired. Since these workers are generally local residents, their salaries stay in Mobile and get spent at the grocery store, or schools, or in any number of local places. That money has a larger multiplier effect locally than money that would go for materials and leave Mobile almost immediately to wherever the building supplier headquarters are."

"Another reason restoring historic buildings is good for the economy is success builds success," stated Bemis. "When one building is restored chances increase that nearby buildings will also be renovated!"

Preservation – the Ultimate Green Practice

During a time of environmental awareness, historic preservation is the ultimate green practice. This point has been stressed over and over by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and advocated by historic commissions and preservationists throughout the country. Ann Bedsole, Alabama's representative to the National Trust, referenced the Battle House Hotel as one example of a project that pitted preservation against new construction.

Since the long-vacant building had deteriorated so badly, it was tempting for John White-Spunner, head of White-Spunner Construction, to suggest it was probably less expensive to demolish the existing hotel and build new. However, Retirement Systems of Alabama CEO, Dr. David Bronner, developer of the project, insisted on complete restoration. "Now John admits that even with all of the problems that arose during the restoration of the Battle House that had they torn that building down it would have cost three to four times more to duplicate the building instead of restoring it, and they would have lost the feel that makes the old hotel so special." Mrs. Bedsole smiled, "John is a preservation convert now!"

Mrs. Bedsole echoed the sentiments of preservationists everywhere. "Old buildings

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HISTORIC REHABILITATIONS ARE BRINGING PAST TO LIFE

Although Mobile has lost many of its historic buildings over the centuries, our downtown is still graced by hundreds of lovely structures from times past. Since the 70s many of those were unused or underused, but in recent months construction crews have been painstakingly bringing them back to life. Following are some of the historic rehabilitations currently underway or recently completed.

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The preservation of the Battle House Hotel was one of downtown's most anticipated renovations. The multi-million dollar project connected to the new RSA Tower. The renovation restored "Mobile's Living Room," and now serves as an anchor for new development.



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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

By Elizabeth Sanders

PRESERVING A LIFESTYLE

Preservation – it is one of those concepts that mean different things to different people. Certainly we have seen this over the past two decades that our organization has been working in downtown Mobile. Regardless of the definition a purist may use, historic preservation is a messy endeavor. People's homes, cultures, and values are involved. Obviously the discussion gets dynamic from there. The give and take going on among neighborhood groups, property owners, and city officials in Mobile shows this dynamism and is a healthy step in the maturation of our preservation culture.

In this issue, the Downtown Alliance News celebrates National Historic Preservation month. We think that even though there are projects of varying levels of cost and refinement happening throughout downtown Mobile, there is so very much to celebrate in each and every one. For what we (and by "we" I mean every business and property owner, the officials at various levels of government, downtown's residents and supporters, and the Downtown Mobile Alliance) are doing is preserving a lifestyle. This lifestyle comes down through our ancestors and the many cities from which they came and will, with proper nurturing, carry through to future generations. If we do this right, our children's children will enjoy the fruits of the work we are currently doing.

The Downtown lifestyle is worth preserving for many reasons, too many for this little column, but I will discuss a few that seem to me the most important. Downtown Mobile by design is democratic – all are welcome in our parks and on our sidewalks. Sometimes this forces us to face human conditions with which we may not be comfortable, but that is the best way to learn about people and, more importantly, ourselves. Small businesses coexist with large corporations. This allows for an understanding among people of different abilities of the talents of each individual. In communities of other types of design, there is a sameness among those with whom one comes in contact.

Downtown is efficient – a great diversity of uses are all accommodated in a very small area of land. Many of these uses share infrastructure needs and therefore save resources. In interviews with downtown workers, they tell us of the time they save in just being able to walk to the bank, or to lunch, or to pick up a gift. In previous work environments, their break-time involved many minutes of time alone in their car at intersections, just to go to lunch. The sharing of building walls; walking places, instead of driving; and the layered use of utility services at a single site all provide an efficiency of resources that saves money, time, and energy.

Downtown is beautiful and inspires creativity – have you seen many artists sitting on Schillinger Road plein air painting lately? Downtown Mobile is the cultural hub of the region. Is there any place along I-10 between New Orleans and Tallahassee where there is more live music playing each weekend? Where do all of the foot races start and end? They run through our neighborhoods almost every weekend, it seems. Our beauty is renown throughout the region and has been for hundreds of years.

Downtown is a community. The attribute we hear over and over from people is that everybody is friendly down here. When people see one another on the sidewalk day after day or week after week, a familiarity seeps in and knits strangers together. This familiarity breeds a comfort with one another that in the end leads us to care generically for each other. The community effect can be felt whether you are a resident, a worker, or a visitor. This is a hospitable place.

To a great extent this is driven by the manner in which our city was laid out and our buildings were built three hundred, two hundred, even one hundred years ago. Somewhere around 40 years ago we got a little off track with our building and civic design ethic. We devalued the importance of street life by outlawing sidewalk activities, by valuing fast moving cars over the pedestrian, and by allowing buildings to have poorly proportioned and/or blank walls along where people walk. Building owners removed or covered over the building ornaments that gave their buildings distinction over any others. They tore buildings down, in the belief that a new building was better and that a clean site was more attractive. We are left today with a downtown with hundreds of great buildings and thousands of empty, weed-filled lots.

In the past two decades, hundreds of brave building and business owners have invested millions of dollars in resuscitating the urban lifestyle. Their investments have preserved and given vibrancy to a place rich with stories and life-enhancing resources. They each have been a part of a preservation movement. These investors have preserved buildings, parks, and landmarks, but I argue most importantly they have preserved a lifestyle. In this lifestyle, people are the focus – their quality of life, their spiritual journey, the blossoming of their creative forces. These are the things that we all are preserving and nurturing, so that as we give this evolving and ever changing organism that is our city to the next generation, they will love it and care for it and preserve it and enhance it for the next generation.

www.downtownmobile.org

261 Dauphin Street

251-434-8498

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are green buildings. You can always restore old buildings. And by restoring a building you don't have to dispose of old materials that add to so much volume to our landfills. You don't have to make new bricks – you have them in place. You don't have to pour more cement – the foundation is there."

Bemis agreed, "On a practical level, reusing our historic buildings just makes good sense." Bemis made a point that many people don't know, "Structures built before 1920 are more energy efficient than any later buildings until the green movement impacted building construction methods in 2000."

Preservation and Sense of Place

"Old buildings give you a feeling of 'you're at home,' and home is a solid place," explained Mrs. Bedsole. "That provides a sense of security and tells you your future is secure."

Bemis agreed and stressed that without these physical reminders of the past, we would not know who we are. "That sense of place creates an atmosphere that is unique to Mobile's downtown. Other cities often have that sense of place in their own downtown, but it is a difference sense of place. This creates a destination that people want to visit, shop and just hang out in."

Bemis also pointed out that our historic areas support a higher level of density that for many years was illegal in the rest of the city. Greater density leads to more pedestrian activity, which creates natural interactions. These daily connections result in the development of "community," the sense that we belong and that our lives are linked. "The sidewalks, where they exist, connect the neighbors, the businesses and the visitors all together. And what would a city be if there were no sense of community," reminded Bemis.

"Historic preservation, downtown revitalization, and tourism are so interconnected as to be almost inseparable," explained Bemis. Preservation is a huge part of the downtown revitalization. It helps create that sense of place, the identity of the area. By maintaining storefronts and minimizing intrusions, preservation had reawakened the downtown's dormancy. That same sense of place is also a draw for tourists. Though people may want to shop on Airport Boulevard, it is downtown that sees the major community activities. Also, with the downtown hotels and the cruise ship, tourists are becoming more and more visible. The buildings are also here for them to enjoy."

Preservation and Heritage Tourism

Over the past ten years the heritage tourism market has been the fastest growing segment of tourism in the United States. Interest in historic sites, genealogy, national parks, and regional travel and recreation has grown steadily, especially in the wake of 9/11, and with the increasing cost of gasoline.

"Heritage Tourism is one of the signature offerings of Mobile," explained Leon Maisel, President and CEO of the Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau. "As one of America's oldest cities, we have over 300 years of history to offer. Historic preservation is vital for our identity as one of the south's greatest cities."

The University of South Alabama Center for Business and Economic Research has been maintaining an attendance database for the MBCVB since the early 1990s. This helps track the monthly attendance for all 'paid admission' tourist attractions. For example, the site reflects that the USS Alabama has averaged 300,000 visitors per year. 2007 attendance figures for downtown historic sites include: Museum of Mobile – 25,062; Phoenix Firehouse Museum – 6,242; The Mobile Carnival Museum – 13,307; and Fort Conde Welcome Center – 48,426.

Since the revitalization movement began, heritage tourism downtown has seen the addition of The Mobile Carnival Museum and the Mobile Police Museum; the opening

of The Museum of Mobile at the Southern Market; an upgrade and remodeling of the Fort Conde Welcome Center; and the addition of a tour boat. And this does not include the addition of our cultural museums: Gulf Coast Exploreum and IMAX Theatre, Space 301 and the upcoming construction of the new Maritime Museum.

With the clustering of historic sites and points of interest, tourists will fill downtown hotels and restaurants, spending money that results in increased tax revenue. "Since the formation of the BID and its effect on downtown, we will see a resurgence for cultural tourism," predicted Maisel. "Downtown is what a tourist looks at. Restoring historic buildings downtown and filling them with shops, restaurants and galleries add to the sense of place and makes Mobile a destination. We have a lifestyle center that can't be duplicated."

Why Historic Preservation is Important

"Mobile is a city that is over 300 years old," stressed Mrs. Bedsole. "We have lost so much already – the French, English and Spanish periods are gone. We had two or three hurricanes during the 1800s and 1900s that devastated the city. We lost portions of the old city to fire. We lost blocks of structures from the legendary munitions explosion at the end of the Civil War. We have just a little bit left," lamented Mrs. Bedsole.

"People want roots. We want to feel connected to our past. We must maintain the feel that we are an established city – a city that is 300 years old," advocated Mrs. Bedsole. "That is what drives people to preserve every little building that we have left. That is what makes Mobile our home, gives us our ambiance, is the very heart of our city."

Well said Mrs. Bedsole.

GLOSSARY: The following terms are commonly used when referring to historic preservation. These definitions were established as the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, the department of the U.S. government that is responsible for historic preservation.

Preservation – Generally, saving from destruction or deterioration old and historic buildings, sites, structures, and objects and providing for their continued use by means of restoration, rehabilitation, or adaptive use. Specifically, "the act or process of applying measures to sustain the existing form, integrity, and material of a building or structure, and the existing form and vegetative cover of a site. It may include stabilization work, where necessary, as well as ongoing maintenance of the historic building materials."

Reconstruction – "The act or process of reproducing by new construction the exact form and detail of a vanished building, structure, or object, or a part thereof, as it appeared at the specific period of time."

Rehabilitation – "The act or process of returning a property to a state of utility through repair or alteration which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions or features of the property which are significant to its historical, architectural, and cultural values."

Restoration – "The act or process of accurately recovering the form and details of a property and its setting as it appeared at the particular period of time by means of the removal of later work or by the replacement of missing earlier work."

Stabilization – "The act or process of applying measures designed to re-establish a weather resistant enclosure and the structural stability of unsafe or deteriorated property while maintaining the essential form as it exists at present."

Section 106 – The provision of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 that requires the head of a federal agency financing or licensing a project to make a determination of the effect of the project on property in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

For more information on historic preservation, visit www.mobilehd.org

A CONVERSATION WITH FRANK W. WHITE

By Rhonda Davis

Frank W. White has recently joined the Alabama Historical Commission as our new Executive Director. White, who comes from the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, will lead Alabama into a new era of historic preservation. Here are some of his thoughts.

Why is historic preservation important?

You see all around you the benefits of good preservation. You have beautiful historic neighborhoods which are great places to live. Your neighborhoods have consistently built more value than other areas of Mobile, so not only are the residents enjoying their homes, they are building wealth. The unique neighborhood character you are

preserving provides a basis for heritage tourism, building wealth for another whole segment of the community.

What role does preservation play in the revitalization of downtowns?

The buildings of downtown Mobile represent the oldest structures in the state. I can congratulate you on the success you've had with applying the four-point Main Street approach over the years, combining preservation with the organization, promotion, and economic changes needed to make downtown successful. So much of the commercial and entertainment life in this country is focused on chains that offer sameness from town to town and state to state. You can come to downtown Mobile and experience a real place, not a corporate place.

How does the preservation of historic buildings benefit Mobile?

You're building an environment here, both in downtowns and neighborhoods, which provides a real sense of place.

What one goal would you like to see for Mobile in our preservation efforts?

You have a city-wide preservation ethic that is second to none. Right now I see your greatest challenge as the rehabilitation of Barton Academy. It's a beautiful building, certainly one of the finest Greek Revival buildings in the state. I'd like to see the whole preservation community come together to see that this building is preserved for future generations in Mobile.



Hargrove and Associates is renovating the old Neisner's building on Royal Street and a portion of the Kress building for offices to house its 200 engineers and support employees. They will move in by the end of the year.



More than 120 years after the **Crescent Theatre** first opened its doors as a vaudeville house, it will reopen as an art house theatre. The building at 208 Dauphin Street is scheduled to open in a few weeks and will also have two large, upscale condominiums on the second and third floors.



Left: The **Mobile Arts and Sports Association** purchased the building at 151-153 Dauphin Street for the new headquarters of the Senior Bowl. Built in 1836, this building's façade was altered in 1945 in an effort to modernize the building. During the 1993 restoration, the building was taken back to its more appropriate design and now plays an important contributing role to the Lower Dauphin Street Historic District.



The historic **Hannah Houses** on Conception Street, which sit on property now owned by the federal government for the future Federal Courthouse, have been vacant for some time, though the **General Services Administration** has recently renovated the buildings for use by local artists and overseen by the Mobile Arts Council.



Left: Originally a car dealership, then home to the **Mobile Press-Register** for many years, the 1920s building at the corner of Government and Claiborne Streets will soon house one of the finest contemporary arts centers in the southeast. The **Centre for the Living Arts** is renovating the massive building into the **Space 301** gallery, offices, an auditorium and a breathtaking rooftop terrace.



Built in 1907, 412 Dauphin Street is best remembered as the home of Gulf Furniture Company's **Mattress Factory**. Today the building is one of downtown's best examples of adaptive reuse, blazing the trail for loft conversions downtown. 412 Dauphin Street has sold all residential units available.



The building at 308 **St. Louis Street** has been a car dealer, a restaurant supply company and now urban residences. 21 residential units now make up **St. Louis Lofts**.



Olesky Brothers Office and School Supply began life as a pawn shop 35 years ago. It recently underwent a major renovation to update the exterior, create a mezzanine and more floor space for office supplies and convenience items



The conversion of the 1860s horse-drawn carriage company at 709 Dauphin Street will create seven residential units known as **Carriage Works**. Some of the units will be finished in May.



In a creative conversion of an empty building at 208 Government Street, the **Red Square** advertising agency created parking on the ground floor with hip office space on the two floors above.

The **de Briere Building**, 54 St. Emanuel, built in 1904, was the location of Troy Steam Laundry until the 1930s when the laundry closed. For the next 30 years, the building was home to Central Optical, which served downtown until the 1960s.



Home to Mobile's archbishops for decades, the **Portier House** is now one of downtown's oldest buildings. Originally constructed in 1833 for Archbishop Portier, it was beautifully restored last year.



The historic building at the corner of Conti and Conception Streets at one time housed a physician and other offices. **O'Gwynn Place** is currently being converted to 10 market rate condominiums.



Known as the **Harvey Building**, 159-161 Dauphin Street was constructed circa 1860. Numerous modifications left the building looking disjointed causing the owners earlier this year to undertake a major renovation of the two storefronts. Once complete each address will have appropriate storefronts, balconies, and modern interiors.



The **Hall-Ford House** in Fort Conde Village is one of the most beautiful buildings being renovated by developer **Larry Posner**. The structure is considered one of the most significant historic houses in Mobile and will be converted into a nine-room bed and breakfast with meeting space.



Parkside Home and Garden at the corner of Conti and Conception Streets was once a spot where folks could leave their carriages when they came to town – the original parking garage! It now houses the newest home and garden accessories shop in downtown.

WEAVING THE FABRIC OF DOWNTOWN MOBILE

By Rhonda Davis

Each issue of *Downtown Alliance News* will feature a brief profile on a downtown business, a non-profit organization and a resident. Look for this profile to discover more about our community and our neighbors.

Alexander's Decorative Arts

Name: Alexander's Decorative Arts

Address: 360 Dauphin Street

Telephone Number: (251) 431-0000

Hours: Wed.-Fri 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Sat. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Alexander's Decorative Arts is one of downtown's newest antique and home accessory stores. Located at the corner of Dauphin Street and Franklin Street, Alexander's carries a combination of antique furniture, estate sale pieces, beautiful lamps, mirrors, artwork, porcelain and glass, and garden accoutrement. Owner Hal Alexander opened the business in late October with the hopes of contributing to downtown's revitalization process.

Originally from Mobile, Alexander moved home in 2002 from Northern California. He caught the antique bug from his cousin, an American antiques dealer who resides in Prattville. He began going on shopping trips with her and admired the wonderful collection of American furniture that she had amassed over her years of collecting.

"I have a nice mix of furniture, accessories and art at good prices," stated Alexander. "I am trying to bring some retail to downtown Mobile. My hope is that this shop becomes a destination." And I think it will.

Browsing through the store, I found several items

"I am trying to bring some retail to downtown Mobile. My hope is that this shop becomes a destination."

that any savvy shopper would snap up. There was a lovely pair of high-quality bird cage lamps for \$135 each. I found a set of Ralph Lauren arm chairs covered in a warm tobacco colored chenille for \$600 each. The most imposing piece was a large pine sideboard from Hungary that dated from the late 1800s. The price was \$2,400. This piece could fill one wall in a kitchen – replacing built-in cabinetry. Alexander shared that his home accessories are at about wholesale prices.



Alexander's is the latest addition to the home décor offerings in downtown. Located on Dauphin Street between Franklin and Claiborne streets, this spacious shop offers a mix of antiques, home accessories and garden accoutrement.



Docents lead tours of the Oakleigh Historic Complex. Oakleigh is open seven days a week for tours. Photo courtesy of the Historic Mobile Preservation Society.

Historic Mobile Preservation Society

Name: Historic Mobile Preservation Society

Address: 300 Oakleigh Place

Telephone Number: 251-432-6161

Website: www.HistoricMobile.org

The Historic Mobile Preservation Society (HMPS) was founded in 1935 as a grassroots membership group dedicated to preserving the tangible links to the past for the benefit of present and future generations. Decades ago dedicated preservation advocates had the foresight to establish an organization that has worked to protect Mobile's historic legacy for many years. Today, the HMPS continues to work hard to advocate for preservation.

The HMPS serves as curator of the Oakleigh Historic Complex. Oakleigh became Mobile's Official

"We are pleased to make the materials in the Archives available for the public's use."

Period House in 1955. The Oakleigh Complex includes Oakleigh built in 1833; the Cox-Deasy House, a fine example of a working-class home, built in 1850; and the Cook's House, used first as a slave house and then as a paid-servant's dwelling, also built in 1850. Attached to Oakleigh is the Minnie E. Mitchell Archives, a repository that houses historic letters, documents, flags, maps and other historically significant items.

Marilyn Culpepper, Executive Director, described the roll that the Preservation Society plays in the community as multi-faceted. "Our primary advocacy role branches into several directions." She described the organization's responsibility to protect our historic legacy and the impact our history has on the city, the county, and the region. She spoke to the benefits of attracting tourists and the revenue that they bring to the area.

Another area that they are actively involved in is education, for both adults and children, through outreach programs that are implemented within the schools, summer camps, and hands-on events offered at Oakleigh. The organization continues to be creative in engaging children in the history of Oakleigh by exposing them to a way of life in the 1800s from the perspective of a wealthy family, a working-class family and the servants. They strive to help children understand how historical events shape who we are today. For adults, HMPS presents series of lectures, book signings, adult educational seminars and events.

The last role Culpepper defines is their function as stewards and curators of the collections they house and the Oakleigh home. "The archives are used by the public daily. We field emails and calls on an ongoing basis for people doing research and students working on projects. We are pleased to make the materials in the Archives available for the public's use," stated Culpepper.

A Downtown Resident Who is Marking a Trail

Name: Dora Finley

Address: Church Street East Historic District

Dora Finley, a resident of the Church Street East Historic District for 23 years, is an active preservationist and community volunteer. Photo courtesy of Dora Finley.

It's difficult to talk to Dora Finley and not have the conversation drift towards her work in his-

toric preservation. A constant advocate for preserving our past, Ms. Finley's hard work is paying off with a new and exciting preservation project.

"I am Chairperson of the Mobile Historic Development Commission's Steering Committee for the African-American Heritage Trail, which is a city project," explained Ms. Finley. "Mobile has a remarkable history, which has largely been ignored by journalists and historians. The African-American Heritage Trail will allow visitors to observe Mobile's diverse cultural experience, filled with the struggles and triumphs of African-Americans whose stories have not been adequately memorialized. The history of the Creole population, the story of the Clotilda, Africa Town, and the urban slave experience are all unique stories that challenge the stereotypical view of life in the Antebellum south. After marking the trail, which will include 32 sites, with a series of African-American heritage plaques, this historic preservation project will produce several versions of driving tours to further articulate and educate others of the significant African-American events and contributions to Mobile history."

When asked why preservation is important to her, Ms. Finley replied in a matter-of-fact tone, "Preservation is the celebration of our culture and heritage. There is amazement and appreciation when one views the beauty of a hand-carved 19th century Victorian Cornice that wraps around a Church Street East porch of distinction. The relics from the past are clues and reminders of our ancestor's triumph over elements and adversities. However, preservation is most important to the future of our children. They must learn of the high prices that others have sacrificed to ensure their present opportunities."

Along with Ms. Finley, her mother Mrs. Joycelyn Finley, her canine companion Chief, her daughter Dr. Nicole Hunt, her brother Karlos Finley and his son Brik all live in this eclectic and close-knit neighborhood.

"Preservation is most important to the future of our children."

REAL ESTATE REVIEW

Each edition of the Downtown Alliance News will feature a different downtown property. The goal of this feature is to provide information to the public on real estate options in the downtown area. If you would like more information on the property featured, please contact the management company or leasing agent directly.



GM&O BUILDING

Address: 110 Beaugard Street

Owner: City of Mobile

Management: R.P. Carbone Property

Telephone Number: (440)449-6750

Year Built: 1907

Total Square Footage: 63,000 square feet

Occupancy Rate: 100%

Leasing Agent: James Haas, R.P. Carbone Property

When you speak of landmark buildings in Mobile there is one building that stands head-and-shoulders above the rest. That building is the grand GM&O Building. This stately Spanish Colonial Revival building, located on the northern boundary of downtown Mobile, was designed by P. Thornton Maye and constructed in the early 1900s. When completed in 1907, the building's construction cost was \$400,000. The GM&O Building's highly ornate façade features a distinct and beautiful 16-arch passageway and is topped with a domed center. The main structure of

Originally opened in 1907, this Spanish Colonial Revival Building sat abandoned for several decades. Now fully restored, The GM&O Building sits like a jewel box on the northern boundary of downtown Mobile. The GM&O Building is on the National Register of Historic Places. Photo courtesy of R.P. Carbone Company.

the building is three levels and connects with a wing that runs north behind the building. The building is masonry construction with a brick exterior and a red Mission tile roof. The flooring is a combination of marble and terrazzo, both of which remain in the building today.

Originally, the building was used as a terminal for the Mobile & Ohio Railroad. It later served as the Gulf Mobile and Ohio Railroad Terminal. In the 1950s, the passenger service for GM&O was discontinued and the building was then used as offices for the Illinois Central Railroad until the building was closed several decades ago.

Through Federal transportation grants and a collaborative effort between the City of Mobile and R.P. Carbone Company of Cleveland, Ohio, restoration of the vacant GM&O Building began in the late 1990s. Carbone worked closely with the Alabama Historical Commission and the Mobile Historic Development Commission, carefully renovating the former rail station. The GM&O reopened in September of 2003 in all her original splendor and earned a spot on the National Register of Historic Places.

Today, the building is completely leased with Le Rose European Café, scheduled to open in June, filling the last remaining space. Staying true to a legacy of transportation, the GM&O Building is now home to Mobile Transit Authority – The Wave, our city's public transportation system. The largest tenant is the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission, leasing 28,000 square feet.

Hosea N. Edwards, Sr., a retired minister, serves as the eyes and ears of the building. Mr. Edwards, an elegant man, watches over the building as the Security Supervisor. He has been sitting at his post for five-and-a-half years, since the building reopened. "We are fortunate to have this building," explained Mr. Edwards with pride in his eyes. "We almost lost it."

TENANT DIRECTORY

South Alabama Regional
Planning Commission
US Department of Agriculture
US Department of Alcohol,
Tobacco and Firearms
Mobile Transit Authority – The Wave
State Farm Insurance
C. H. Robinson Worldwide
Le Rose European Café –
opening soon

"(The GM&O) serves as a wonderful reminder of our past, and people today enjoy coming through the building and experiencing it as it should be, as the grand building it is."

"As a boy of 11 or 12, I used to come after school and shine shoes. At that time you could earn big money. I met people coming and going – traveling by train. I had regular customers – men who traveled for business. It was really something back then," reminisced Edwards, remembering the glory days of train travel.

"It is very advantageous to have this building," Edwards stressed. "It serves as a wonderful reminder of our past, and people today enjoy coming through the building and experiencing it as it should be, as the grand building it is."

Today, Jim Sweat and his wife conduct tours of the historic building on a volunteer basis and at no charge. Mr. Sweat worked in the GM&O Building for 55 years and holds the same reverence as Mr. Edwards for this

magnificent structure. If you are interested in scheduling a tour, please visit the GM&O Building.

The GM&O Building's Grand Lobby is available to rent for special events. For rental information contact Mr. James Haas at (440) 449-6750, or visit www.gmando.com.

NEWSLETTER CHANGES: For the past several years the Downtown Alliance News, originally Around Downtown, has served as a vehicle to share positive developments in downtown and educate the general public about the benefits of a strong city center. Many hundreds of articles and thousands of words later, we have decided to scale back the Downtown Alliance News, not in terms of content, simply in terms of distribution.

Mailing and printing costs have increased dramatically in recent years and our mailing list has grown to almost 2000 names. Beginning this fall the Downtown Alliance News will be mailed only to members of the Downtown Mobile District Management Corporation (our Business Improvement District property owners) and the Downtown Mobile Alliance as well as donors to Main Street Mobile, Inc. The Downtown Alliance News will still be available at dozens of your favorite downtown dining and shopping spots, as always, at no charge.

If you'd like information about joining the Downtown Mobile Alliance, please contact Susan Daniels at sdaniels@downtownmobile.org or 251-434-8498. Receipt of the newsletter is only one of many benefits of joining!



Market in the Square

Open Saturdays in
Cathedral Square
April 26 – July 26
7:30 a.m. to 1:00 a.m.

MASTER PLAN UPDATE

By Carol Hunter

The three public input meetings for the New Plan for Old Mobile were extremely well attended with no shortage of ideas for a new vision for downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. Nearly 1000 people participated in the process and gave the urban planning firm EDSA much to work with over the next couple of months. The design team will be back in Mobile in June with preliminary plans for community review.

If you were unable to attend the sessions in March, there is still an opportunity for your voice to be heard and your ideas to be included. Visit the city's planning web site, www.newmobileplan.com, and click on any of the three neighborhood "doors", then scroll down to download the neighborhood survey. The survey may be mailed to Barbara Drummond, City of Mobile, P.O. Box 1827, Mobile, AL 36633.

Financial support for the plan has also been encouraging. To date almost \$50,000 has been raised toward our goal of \$100,000. If you'd like to join in this important endeavor, please contact Elizabeth Sanders at 251-434-8498 or esanders@downtownmobile.org.

Many thanks to those who have already made donations or pledges:

Platinum Investors

Alabama Power Foundation
Hearin-Chandler Foundation

Gold Investors

A.S. Mitchell Foundation
Ben May Charitable Trust

Silver Investors

Christ Church Cathedral
Church Street East Historic District
Committee for the Restoration of Historic Monroe Park
Dee Gambill
Gulf Coast Multiple Listing Service
Keep Mobile Moving
MLK Jr. Avenue Redevelopment Corporation
Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau
Oakleigh Garden District Society
Sybil H. Smith Charitable Trust

Friends of Planning

219 Restaurant
AT&T
DeTonti Square Neighborhood Association
Mobile Bay Transportation Company, Inc.
Spot of Tea

EVENTS

MAY

May 17 – *Angelman Syndrome Foundation National Walk-A-Thon*, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., Bienville Square
May 18 – *The Fab Four: The Ultimate Tribute*, concert, 8:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
May 18 – *Mobile Ballet Showcase 2008*, Mobile Civic Center Theater
May 31 – *Ultimate Fighting*, tba, Mobile Civic Center Arena

JUNE

May 31 & June 1 – *2nd Annual Gulf Coast Women's Expo*, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. and 11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. respectively, Mobile Civic Center Expo Hall
June 1 through July 6 – *Southern Gothic Now*, Space 301 Off Centre
June 3 through August 21 – *Amazon*, movie, J. L. Bedsole IMAX Dome Theater
June 3 through November 26 – *Hurricane on the Bayou*, movie, J. L. Bedsole IMAX Dome Theater
June 7 through June 15 – *Marcan Tiger Preserve*, green space adjacent to the Gulf Coast Exploreum and Science Center
June 13 – November 2 – *Frogs! Beyond Green*, Gulf Coast Exploreum and Science Center
June 13 – *LoDa Artwalk*, 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m., Cathedral Square Arts District
June 13, *Ernie Hasse & Signature Sound*, concert, 7:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
June 20 – *Carrie Underwood*, concert, 7:30 p.m., Mobile Civic Center Arena
June 20 – *Kenny Lattimore and Chante*, concert, 8:00 p.m., Saenger Theatre
June 24 – *Johnny Lang*, concert, 7:30 p.m., Saenger Theatre
June 25, 26, 27 & 28 – *51st America's Junior Miss*, 7:30 p.m., Mobile Civic Center Theater
June 29 – *Vespers* presented by Musica Sacra Chamber Choir, 5:00 p.m., Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

For a complete schedule of events for the Mobile Public Library's Ben May Main Library, - including film series, children's events, computer classes, book club and meet the author - please visit www.mplonline.org.

YOUNG MINDS – YOUNG VIEWS

When you want to know something – go to the source. That's just what the Downtown Mobile Alliance did when we wanted to know how to, and what, would attract the young adult market to downtown. Forming a partnership with Spring Hill College's Communications Department, the DMA is working with Sean Driscoll, a senior from California and Benjamin Lauber, a junior St. Louis to help craft a new marketing message for the 20-something audience. Both young men are Integrated Communication majors and spend time in downtown's entertainment district. Sean is the lead singer and guitarist for the band Perplexium, Inc. and Ben comes downtown on a regular basis, spending some of his time listening to his friend's band.

"This is a senior-level course in which students tackle a real-world project so they can better connect theory and practice," explained Sharee Broussard, Instructor. "Spring Hill College reaches out to nonprofits in the area for such projects and the result is usually a win-win for both the students and organizations like the Downtown Mobile Alliance. The organization gets free planning help and the students get portfolio pieces. Carol Hunter has been a pleasure to work with. She asked the team to create a plan that will help get young adults downtown more. Sean and Ben are very creative and the work they produce should be useful to DMA."

The Downtown Mobile Alliance would like to thank the Communications Department of Spring Hill College for collaborating with us on this exciting new project.

BROWN BAG

Grab lunch and head to Bienville Square for this spring's Brown Bag in Bienville lunchtime concert series. Catt Sirten of WHIL's Radio Avalon, working in conjunction with the city's Department of Neighborhood & Community Services, will host this annual outdoor music series. Tables and chairs will be set-up throughout Bienville Square for everyone to enjoy. Brown Bag in Bienville is held every Wednesday in April continuing through May 28 from 11:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m.. The event is free of charge and the public is invited to attend.

NEED HELP?

CALL THE DISTRICT
HOTLINE
251-327-SAFE
(251-327-7233)

The Regents provide motorist aid, escorts to vehicles and visitor information.

Keychain tags with the telephone number printed on it are available at the DMDMC office. Pick one up the next time you walk by. The Hotline phone service is provided by AT&T Wireless.

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