

OLD ST. MATTHEW SCHOOL MELROSE, LOUISIANA



HONORING THE PAST WITH A FUTURE OF RE- STORED COMMUNITY SERVICE

How much does a legacy cost? Marvin Toussaint, president of the St. Matthew School Community Association (SMSCA), determined that “If my generation, the people who are the last ones to go and remember it as a high school, doesn’t do something to preserve it now, then it will never happen.” Mr. Toussaint has been working on this project since 2003. His determination and search for resources to accomplish this goal led him to seek assistance from the



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA). The US EPA’s Brownfields Program became a valuable source for assessment and cleanup through its Targeted Brownfields Assessment (TBA) services and competitive cleanup grant funding. SMSCA pursued a \$197,996 Brownfields Cleanup Grant which was awarded in 2007.

This school is more than just a school. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the first public high school in the country constructed for African Americans. SMSCA’s vision is for this site to become the premier non-profit service location for the rural Down River Community of the Cane River Region. The historic school facilities and grounds will provide a location for many social, cultural, educational, and health-related organizations as they share their services with the community’s diverse population and area visitors.

The Brownfields Cleanup Grant was used to address Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) and Lead-Based Paint (LBP) at the Saint Matthew School site in February 2008. On behalf of SMSCA, the EPA Region 6 Targeted Brownfields Assessment program conducted a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment to survey the ACM and LBP at the Saint Matthew School. The survey report was issued in March 2008 and confirmed the presence of these contaminants in the seven buildings inspected. Floor tiles, roofing materials, ceiling texture, window glazing, and exterior panels with ACM were located throughout all the buildings and determined to be a possible risk of asbestos exposure to the public. Small amounts of LBP were located on door casings and jams, window casings and sills, and some exterior surfaces.

...HONOR THE MEMORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS...WHO WALKED MILES TO ATTEND THE ONLY SCHOOL AVAILABLE TO THEM.

A Community Relations Plan was completed in September 2008. SMSCA developed and distributed brochures addressing potential health hazards associated with exposure to ACM and LBP to churches and residents in the immediate vicinity of the St. Matthew School. Asbestos abatement activities were completed in December 2008, and lead-base paint abatement in May 2009. All remediation was done in strict compliance with state and federal guidelines.

Asking the question again, how much does a legacy cost? A legacy to honor the memory of African American students from Robeline, Provencal, Natchez, Natchitoches and Cloutsville Parish who walked miles to attend the only school available to them — **Priceless**. For more information, contact Katherine Johnson, email: kjohnson@caneriverheritage.org, or phone 318-356-5555.