



New Orleans - Two Creative Strategies for Rebuilding Post-Katrina Part 2 - "Musicians' Village" in the Upper 9th Ward

Part 1 talked about a strategy for the Lower 9th Ward, hardest hit by Katrina back in 2005. While the Upper 9th, on the opposite side of the Industrial Canal may not have seen the same level of death and destruction, it was still huge!

I took an AIA tour of this area while attending the American Institute of Architects Convention in May.

Harry Connick Jr. and Branford Marsalis have come up with an awesome **strategy** to rebuild the neighbourhood. [The Musicians' Village.](#)

Now, the world knows that music is the heart and soul of New Orleans.

Our guide reminded us that, generally-speaking, musicians in the Crescent City aren't rich. Many lost their modest homes during Katrina and couldn't afford to rebuild. Others were living in inadequate housing. As a result, they left the city and are widely dispersed across the US.

While providing desperately-needed and state-of-the-art affordable housing, Harry and Branson hatched another strategic objective - to attract musicians back home to New Orleans.

Working in partnership with Habitat for Humanity they have created a new neighbourhood of 72 compact, sustainably-designed single-detached and duplex homes. Each unit is about 1,000 sf.

We were told that the homes are available to anyone - not just musicians, though they were strongly encouraged to apply to the program. And, [a number now live there.](#)

The usual Habitat for Humanity criteria are used to evaluate applicants

- Need for Shelter
- Ability to Pay
- Willingness to Partner

BUT, the focal point for this new district is the [Ellis Marsalis Center for Music](#), named in honour of the patriarch of the Marsalis family - four of the six sons are well-known musicians.



The Center includes a beautiful, 100-seat performance space, classrooms, practice rooms and a terrific central courtyard. It includes computers that are available to neighbours. The intention is that the repatriated musicians will use the practice and performance spaces AND interact with the local kids, mentoring and teaching them after school, in the evenings and on weekends and holidays.



I had a chat with the Executive Director who is absolutely passionate about this project with its focus on acquainting children with the world of music ... so critically important to every child's development and growth!

The grand opening is scheduled for August 2011 - and I wished them all the *greatest success!*

Meantime, the houses have gone up and people have moved in.



Our guides explained that the future owners were expected to put 350 hours of 'sweat equity' into their home, which is typical of the Habitat for Humanity strategy. They then carry an \$85,000 no-interest mortgage for 20 years - none of the 'subprime' nonsense that contributed to the Great Recession in the US! There's also a second mortgage of \$25,000 that is forgiven if they own and live in the home for 10 years.



What I found quite fascinating, by the way, is how quickly folks are *personalizing* their homes ... pride of ownership!



I should also mention the fabulous outdoor playspace/park right across from the Marsalis Center. A musical theme, including a giant fountain shaped like a trombone above the splashpad and 'keyboard' paving!



So ... *The New Orleans Musicians' Village.*

A truly unique strategy, designed to very specific local circumstances, and very well executed.

Brian Watkinson, Principal, Strategies 4 Impact!