

Architecture students build outdoor gathering space for community bike shop

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Members of the design/build team from the Tulane School of Architecture celebrate the completion of their project Wednesday, May 9, at RUBARB bike repair shop in New Orleans. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

After hammering, welding and painting through much of the semester, 13 Tulane architecture students have a new appreciation for collaboration, community engagement and the power of elbow grease.

The students were tasked with designing and building a shaded outdoor space for the [RUBARB](#) (Rusted Up Beyond All Recognition Bikes) bike repair shop as part of a studio course through the [Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design](#), the community design center of the Tulane School of Architecture.

The new exterior upgrades, including a bicycle-inspired canopy, rain catchment, benches and bike racks, expand RUBARB's "Chill Zone," an area for neighborhood youth to hang out, play games, read and eat healthy snacks.

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“Besides being a bike shop that focuses on repairing and building bikes, RUBARB is also a community space,” said longtime RUBARB volunteer Liz Lichtman. “The new shade structure and benches will provide a place for hanging out to happen, even when we are closed.”

Led by Emilie Taylor Welty, Small Center design/build manager, students began the project by volunteering at RUBARB to better understand operations, needs and stakeholders. Throughout the semester, a series of design feedback sessions with area neighbors, local youth and RUBARB volunteers influenced everything from bench heights to materials selection.

“More than anything, the lesson I hope the students walk away with is that design is a messy, layered, collaborative process that involves lots of creative problem-solving and hard work,” said Taylor Welty. “And when done well, it's fun and has positive impacts for us all.”

Undergraduate architecture student Sarah Rivard echoed her professor’s sentiment. “It’s rewarding taking a project from conception all the way through, enduring all the struggles along the way and learning so much from each challenge.”

