

Architecture students bring life to local shelter

February 01, 2017 11:30 AM Barri Bronston

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Tulane students Rebecca Cumming, left, and Haley Lindsley, right, work on the final details of a bench at Ozanam Inn. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

“It’s a godsend.”

Those were the three words that Renée Borie Blanche, director of development at Ozanam Inn, used to describe the exterior improvements of the Camp Street center for the homeless.

Among them, a polymer overhang inscribed with such words as “inspire,” “faith” and “love,” an updated wheel chair ramp and a deck complete with rows of wooden benches, all with backs, tabletops and space beneath for clients to store their belongings.

The space serves as a line-up area for meals and others services but also as a hang out for those who simply want to be off the streets.

“It wasn’t very inviting before, and it wasn’t very comfortable,” Blanche said. “Now it looks great, and we’re just so excited.”

Blanche credits the [Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design](#), the community design center that is part of the [Tulane University School of Architecture](#). As part of their Fall Design/Build Studio project, 13 students did most of the work, from client interviews to design, fabrication and installation.

The process began last year when Small Center, which provides high-quality design assistance for nonprofit groups that are traditionally underserved by the design profession, put out its annual request for proposals. Ozanam Inn’s was one of over 30 project proposals submitted.

Under the direction of adjunct professors Doug Harmon and Nick Jenisch, students met with Ozanam Inn staff and clients to get a feel for what they wanted. All agreed on the need for an outdoor area that provided protection from inclement weather while brightening up an otherwise dingy, depressing space.

“It was intense but in a good way,” graduate student Wells Megalli said of the work. “It feels good that we’re making a real difference in the lives of real people.”

“Students want to have a meaningful impact,” Harmon said. “The hope is that they walk away from this experience as different designers.”

Ozanam Inn will show off the improvements at a celebration Saturday, Feb. 4 at noon.

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