

[Mardi Gras Indians center in progress](#)

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On Fat Tuesday, members of the Guardians of the Flame Mardi Gras Indian tribe will gather in the Upper Ninth Ward, near the construction site for the new Guardians Institute pavilion and classroom, designed by a Tulane City Center team of students and staff led by Scott Ruff, associate professor of architecture.



Scott Ruff, associate professor of architecture, oversees construction of the Guardians Institute facility in the Upper Ninth Ward. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

[Ruff](#) and his team designed the outdoor performance space and indoor literacy center now under construction at 1930 Independence St.

For nearly two years, the group from the Tulane School of Architecture has worked closely on the project with leaders of the [Guardians Institute](#), a grassroots organization dedicated to preserving the history of the Mardi Gras Indians and strengthening the community.

After being involved in the design phase, students are now constructing the [Tulane City Center](#) project. In the process, the students “gain a tremendous amount of

knowledge about how architecture is built,” Ruff says.



Architecture students are doing all the construction for the institute's outdoor pavilion and an indoor classroom. Here, Justin Siragusa, left, and Steven Baker work on flooring.

Throughout the design/build process, Guardians of the Flame members have been generous to the Tulane students, Ruff says. “They have made sure that our students have been engaged with the core elements of a New Orleans experience.

“They bring people to the site. We've had our opening ceremonies blessed by spiritual leaders within their organization. And we've eaten great food.”

On a plot of land adjacent to the structure currently under construction, the Guardians Institute eventually plans to build the Donald Harrison Sr. Museum to display and protect Mardi Gras Indian costumes in a climate-controlled environment.

[Ruff](#) has long been interested in African American aesthetics in spatial design. He also designed an altar of reclaimed material from houses for the All Souls Episcopal Church in the Lower Ninth Ward. Once known as “Saint Walgreens,” the church was established after Hurricane Katrina and is the first Episcopal Church in that neighborhood.

“Great opportunities exist here in New Orleans to engage the rich African American culture,” he says.