

## Circle Food finally makes a turnaround

February 25, 2013 12:45 PM Carol Schlueter  
cjs@tulane.edu

More than seven years after Hurricane Katrina flooding took it out of commission, the iconic Seventh Ward Circle Food Store is undergoing a \$7 million renovation and is scheduled to reopen in October, with two Tulane School of Architecture alumni guiding the complicated project.



Touring the gutted interior of Circle Food Store, ready for renovation, are project architect Joel Ross, left, and John Williams, whose firm is known for its preservation projects. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

About a year ago, architect and alumnus [John Williams](#) was approached by Dwayne Boudreaux, owner of Circle Food, about getting his establishment back in operation.

It wasn't going to be easy; Boudreaux had tried several times, unsuccessfully, to redevelop the much-needed store revered by the Seventh Ward and Treme neighborhoods for fresh food and seasonal merchandise such as Easter candy.

This time the store is definitely on a comeback, with work by Williams and his associate, project architect and alumnus Joel Ross; by [Tulane students](#) who helped Boudreaux with planning; and by Ben Tiller, vice president of The Berger Co., a real estate development firm.

“We were just not going to fail,” Williams says firmly. He is known for historic [renovation projects](#). “I’ve always felt Circle Food was one of those things worth paying for.” It was the first African American owned and operated grocery store in New Orleans.

The [financing](#) took a team effort, with Williams working to obtain a host of federal and state tax credits, and with the city of New Orleans providing funds from its Fresh Food Retailer Initiative for the 1930s-era grocery, named after the traffic circle that used to exist at the intersection of Claiborne and St. Bernard avenues.

The architectural work was challenging. Williams calls the store “a 30,000 square-foot, complicated old building” with several different roof styles that required “putting the divergent parts together.”

He believes its reopening will inspire more turnaround for the adjacent neighborhoods. “People will move back to town because of Circle Food; that’s why I’m helping.”