

Documentary chronicles iconic NOLA hospital

October 17, 2014 12:00 PM Keith Brannon

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In his documentary *Big Charity*, Tulane University alumnus Alex Glustrom captures the history and spirit of the once-famed Charity Hospital, which has been moldering since Hurricane Katrina. (Photo from Alex Glustrom)

The towering shell that once was New Orleans' iconic [Charity Hospital](#) has held a special allure for filmmaker Alex Glustrom.

"Residents spoke of it with a strong love and affection that I had never heard expressed about a building," said Glustrom, a Tulane University alumnus. "It was as if the hospital had been human."

Glustrom spent five years making *Big Charity*, a documentary about the life and death of the now abandoned, 300-year-old hospital, which was a safety net for the city's uninsured and a major training ground for medical students and nurses before Hurricane Katrina. The film premieres at the [New Orleans Film Festival](#) with screenings scheduled for Tuesday (Oct. 21) and Wednesday (Oct. 22).

The movie chronicles the hospital's evolution from a small facility once run by nuns into a public institution that was once the second-largest hospital in the country. It features emotional interviews with staff who fought to care for patients stranded in the hospital after the storm. The film also gives a rare look inside the now-moldered building.

The state shuttered the facility to build University Medical Center, a new, \$1.2 billion facility under construction several blocks away between Tulane Avenue and Canal Street. The film covers the controversy surrounding the closure and how healthcare services were shifted to other facilities.

"I was really interested in not just the way the storm changed the city, but the way the decisions post-storm changed the city," Glustrom said. "The storm was used as a restart button and an opportunity to change things ? whether for better or for worse."

He hopes the film memorializes the hospital's ideals of serving the poor and its staff's dedication to the city.

"I hope people can look back at this movie and know what Charity Hospital meant and what it stood for, what the doctors' and nurses' values were," Glustrom said, "and that the movie can help that spirit of Charity live on."

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