

Preserving Mardi Gras Indian culture

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The Guardians Institute performance and multi-use space at 1930 Independence St. in New Orleans is designed to preserve the history of Mardi Gras Indians and strengthen the community. It was developed by Scott Ruff, an associate professor of architecture, and his students at the Tulane School of Architecture as part of a Tulane City Center design-build seminar. (Photo by Andrea Mabry)

As an architectural designer, Scott Ruff doesn't always have the time to see one of his projects up and running. He's already moved on to the next one.

But when a reporter asked to meet him at the [Guardians Institute performance and multiuse space](#) that he and his students at the Tulane School of Architecture

developed as part of a [Tulane City Center](#) design-build seminar, he was in awe.

“It fills you up to see that the work you’ve done is not only beautiful but also useful ? highly useful ? and that people appreciate it,” says Ruff, an associate professor of architecture. “As a designer, you oftentimes move away from a project when it’s at the height of its use.”

Ruff was referring to the schoolchildren who were visiting the space that day to learn about the tradition and culture of the Mardi Gras Indians. He says he always knew the project was a special one but seeing it in action confirmed his beliefs.

“When we choose a project, it has to have an intellectual and social focus and rigor to it,” Ruff says of Tulane City Center’s application process. “That’s one of the things that makes the program among the elite design-build programs in the nation.”

Located in the Upper Ninth Ward, the space is officially dubbed the [Donald Harrison Sr. Museum](#) after the late beloved big chief of the Guardians of the Flame Mardi Gras Indians. Harrison died in 1998, but his wife Herreast Harrison and grown children made it their mission to keep his spirit alive through the programs, performances and exhibits offered at the museum.

Ruff says he is proud to have been involved with such a meaningful project, as he is a true Mardi Gras Indian enthusiast.

And yes, he will be among the throngs of revelers at the annual [Super Sunday festivities](#) staged by the Mardi Gras Indian Council on March 15. The festival begins at 11 a.m. and the parade at 1 p.m. beginning at A. L. Davis Park at Washington Avenue and LaSalle Street in Central City.

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